

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Attorney General

Josh Stein

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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A LETTER FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL JOSH STEIN

To the people of North Carolina,

2020 was unlike any other year. I am incredibly proud to tell you that even after the Department of Justice largely shifted to work-from-home status in the spring due to danger from the pandemic, my colleagues at the DOJ continued to work hard to serve you. That focus continued throughout a year that brought challenge after challenge for us all.

COVID-19

As I'm sure was the case for everyone reading this report, COVID-19 shifted our focus and changed our work dramatically. As you will read in the following pages, our office worked to protect North Carolinians during the pandemic. That work includes successfully defending the governor's executive orders to protect the public's health, protecting people's finances during difficult times, helping them stay in their homes and avoid eviction, fighting scammers and price gougers trying to take advantage of the crisis, and providing resources for those in vulnerable stay-at-home situations, such as victims of domestic violence or people with substance use disorders.

A Reckoning on Racial Equity

2020 also brought the racial injustice that is deeply rooted in our criminal justice system to the forefront for us all to see. So many of us were sheltering in place, glued to the television and social media, as we watched or learned of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others and the resulting public protests against injustice. I was honored when Gov. Roy Cooper appointed me co-chair of the Task Force on Racial Equity in Criminal Justice. Serving in this capacity alongside North Carolina Supreme Court Associate Justice Anita Earls has been incredibly important as we worked with leaders across the state to identify measures to improve our criminal justice system. One thing is clear: we have work to do to ensure that every North Carolinian is treated fairly by our criminal justice system, regardless of the color of their skin. I am committed to doing my part in the coming year and beyond to address this problem.

Sexual Assault Kits

Testing previously untested sexual assault kits in local law enforcement possession continues to be a top priority. This past year we saw progress as the Survivor Act came into effect. Not only are those appropriations enabling kits to get tested, but we are seeing more newly-collected kits arrive to the State Crime Lab (SCL) in a timely manner. While each of these kits represents a tragedy in a person's life, sending these kits to the SCL is a positive development because our scientists can frequently create leads for law enforcement to investigate. I am also encouraged by the increasing number of arrests that were made last year as a result of testing the older kits – decades-old rapes in cold cases are now hot because the kits were tested. We will continue to work with stakeholders across North Carolina to ensure this backlog never happens again.

Health Care

Protecting the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the health care it provides to millions of North Carolinians has always been important to me. But fighting to maintain the ACA became even more critical when we viewed it through the lens of a global pandemic. I am proud to say that my office was part of a coalition of state attorneys general who fought all the way up to the Supreme Court to maintain life-saving health care for our people.

Protecting Our Natural Resources

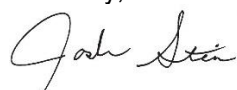
2020 was also the year that PFAS entered our statewide lexicon. We now know more than ever about the risks these “forever chemicals” pose to our health, and my office is demanding that DuPont and Chemours be held accountable for the damage they’ve caused to our state. We launched a widespread investigation into all the potential PFAS contamination in North Carolina and have filed a lawsuit against DuPont and Chemours for dumping these chemicals in our state. North Carolinians must have clean air, water, and land, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that they do.

Hanging Up on Robocalls

Early in 2020, my office launched an initiative to fight the scourge of robocalls. These insidious calls are annoying at best – but at worst they lead to vulnerable people losing thousands of hard-earned dollars. In 2020, people reported more than 10,000 robocalls to my office. These reports give us actionable leads to investigate. If you receive a robocall, please report it via www.ncdoj.gov/norobo or call 1-844-8-NO-ROBO.

I want to again commend my colleagues at the Department of Justice who have tirelessly devoted themselves to this important work amid tremendous challenges. I also want to offer my heartfelt gratitude to the people of North Carolina who elected me to a second term in 2020. I recently took my second oath of office and I am excited and honored to continue serving as your North Carolina Attorney General. As you will read in the pages of this report, we have made great progress on important issues – but there is much more work to do. I look forward to continuing to serve.

Sincerely,



Josh Stein
Attorney General

ABOUT THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The public servants at the North Carolina Department of Justice (DOJ) work to protect the people of North Carolina and are guided by the organizational values of public service, integrity, excellence, teamwork, diversity, and innovation.

MISSION STATEMENT

The North Carolina Department of Justice (DOJ) protects the people of North Carolina through its work to prevent crime and support law enforcement, to safeguard consumers, and to defend the State, its people, and their constitutional rights.



VISION STATEMENT

The North Carolina Department of Justice provides excellent legal representation and support to law enforcement, consumers, the State, and its people through teamwork, innovation, and a commitment to public service.



An Overview of DOJ

More than 880 employees, including nearly 300 attorneys, work at DOJ in various divisions and organizations. Employees in each part of DOJ focus on protecting North Carolinians in various ways through their work.

**IN FY 2019-2020,
DOJ
ATTORNEYS
AND STAFF
DEVOTED**

**MORE THAN
460,000
HOURS PROTECTING
THE RIGHTS OF
NORTH CAROLINIANS.**

**OUR WORK
SAVED THE
STATE**

**MORE THAN
\$90
MILLION
IN LEGAL FEES.**

Our **Consumer Protection Division** protects consumers and seniors from scams and fraud. Our consumer specialists work to resolve consumer complaints. The attorneys investigate batches of consumer complaints and hold businesses and individuals accountable when they break North Carolina's consumer laws.

The **Public Protection Section** focuses on educating the public to prevent crime and support victims, focusing on survivors of violent crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assault. Public Protection specialists also speak with North Carolinians across the state to warn people about scams and fraud and share ways to protect themselves and their information.

DOJ's **Criminal Division** represents the state in all criminal appeals and assists local district attorneys in prosecuting certain cases.

The **Special Prosecutions and Law Enforcement Section** represents North Carolina's Standards Commissions and provides legal guidance and technical assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies.

The **Public Safety Section** represents the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

Our **Medicaid Investigations Division** investigates and prosecutes fraud and abuse by health care providers and companies. It also protects patients against abuse and neglect in facilities funded by Medicaid.

The **Environmental Division** protects the air we breathe and the water we drink. These attorneys and staff ensure compliance with environmental regulations, and they hold polluters accountable by forcing them to clean up the messes they create. The division represents the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and also provides legal advice and representation to the various state environmental boards and commissions with jurisdiction over our state's natural resources.

Our **Civil Division** provides legal advice and representation to a number of state government departments, agencies, and commissions to help them further their public mission and save taxpayer dollars.

The **Health and Human Services Division** represents the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and its divisions.

The **Transportation Division** represents the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Division of Motor Vehicles to help them keep North Carolina moving.

The **Litigation Division** handles special litigation and tort and workers' compensation claims.

The **Solicitor General's Office** oversees the state's civil appeals and manages select strategic litigation.

The **North Carolina Justice Academy** provides training on its two campuses to law enforcement officers as they serve communities across North Carolina.

The **Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission** and the **Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission** oversee training, standards, and certification of law enforcement and criminal justice officers. They ensure that officers enter the profession prepared to effectively keep North Carolinians safe.

Forensic scientists and other personnel at the **State Crime Laboratory** are responsible for the analysis of evidence to help solve crimes and provide assistance in law enforcement investigations. They use science to get to the truth.

Where does your DOJ dollar go?

Using science to convict the guilty and exonerate the innocent

Training and educating law enforcement officers

Protecting the environment



Protecting tax dollars and limiting state liability

Prosecuting criminals

Running the department

Notice something missing? Our work protecting consumers and vulnerable people is 100% self-funded. That saves taxpayers more than \$6 million every year.

WORKING TOWARDS A MORE EQUAL NORTH CAROLINA

In June 2020, Gov. Roy Cooper created the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice and appointed Attorney General Josh Stein and Supreme Court Associate Justice Anita Earls as co-chairs. This action came after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others at the hands of law enforcement officers. The circumstances of their deaths led to widespread public protests throughout the country, including in North Carolina. The protests sparked conversations about the systemic racism and resulting harm that Black people and other communities of color have experienced for decades in housing, employment, education, health care, and criminal justice. Gov. Cooper asked the task force to recommend and work to implement solutions to end disparate outcomes in the criminal justice system, mitigate the effects of bias and discrimination, and increase accountability in law enforcement and criminal justice.

The statistics that illustrate racial inequity in criminal justice are staggering:



Under Attorney General Stein's and Justice Earls' leadership, the task force recommended 125 solutions to increase racial equity in law enforcement and the courts. Law enforcement recommendations include solutions to reimagine public safety, improve policing practices, enhance accountability, and strengthen recruitment, training, and the law enforcement profession. Court recommendations include solutions to eliminate racial disparities in the courts and promote racial equity post-conviction. The wide range of recommendations include a duty to intervene by law enforcement when another officer uses excessive force, a ban on law enforcement chokeholds, expanded use of mental health professionals in law enforcement, and decriminalization of personal possession of small amounts of marijuana.

Members across DOJ served on or provided support to the task force, including members of the Criminal Division, the Medicaid Investigations Division, the Justice Academy, the Training and Standards Commissions, and the Public Protection Section.

These recommendations are only the task force's first step. In addition to the issues and solutions it identifies, the task force identified the necessary actions required to successfully implement these solutions in North Carolina. Over the next two years, the task force and Attorney General Stein will work with policymakers and partners to implement these solutions. An overview of the recommendations is available [here](#), and an executive summary of the report is available [here](#). The full report is available [here](#).

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has reshaped every part of our lives – how we live, who we meet, how we work, where we go. As people across North Carolina and the country have adapted to protect their health and keep their loved ones safe, DOJ has been working to ensure that North Carolinians are protected during this pandemic and can access the resources they need to navigate hardships during this crisis.

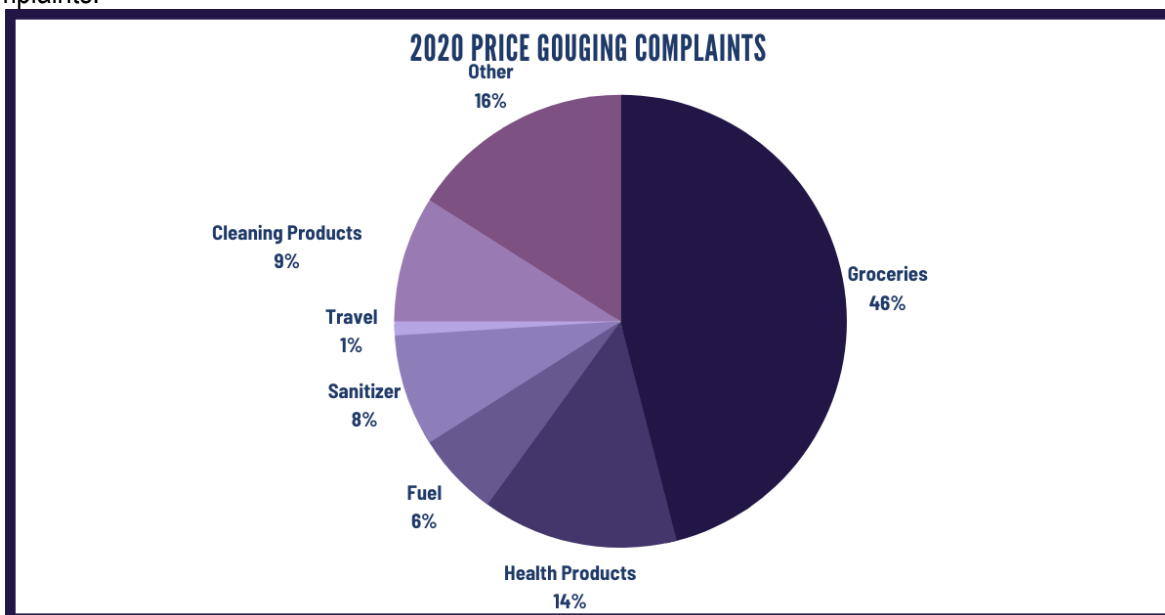
Keeping Utilities and Housing in Place

Clean water and a safe place to live are essential at any time but are especially critical during a public health pandemic when people need to stay home. Attorney General Stein wrote to local and municipal utilities at the onset of the pandemic, asking them not to disconnect residents from these services if they were unable to pay their bills. DOJ later worked with Gov. Cooper on an executive order from the governor to prohibit utilities from cutting off water, gas, and power to North Carolinians who could not pay.

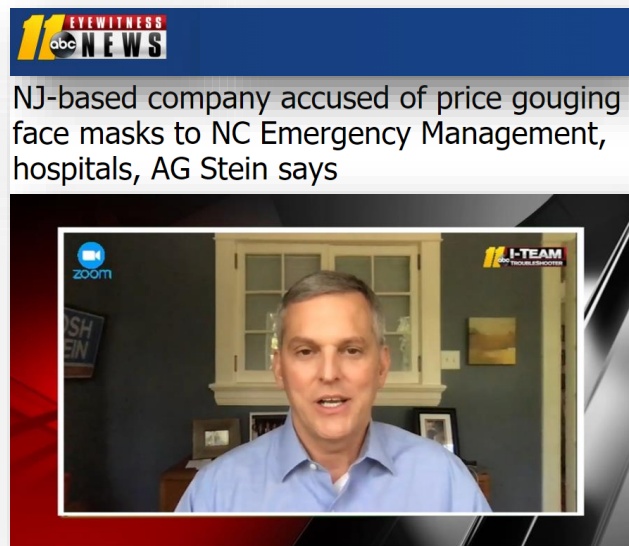
DOJ also worked with Gov. Cooper on a statewide executive order to protect North Carolina residents by halting ongoing foreclosure and eviction hearings and barring new eviction orders. Attorney General Stein and Gov. Cooper encouraged court officials to be lenient in property and tenant-related proceedings and encouraged sheriffs to delay performing evictions on eviction orders that had already been issued. Gov. Cooper later extended this moratorium. In North Carolina, nearly half a million individuals in rental housing are behind on rent and nearly 3 million individuals are burdened by household expenses as a result of the pandemic. ([Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)). It is essential that Congress provide landlords funds to cover tenants who cannot pay.

Enforcing the Law Against Price Gougers

When Gov. Cooper declared a state of emergency in North Carolina in March, the state's price gouging statute went into effect immediately. The law prohibits charging too much for goods and services in times of a crisis. During the pandemic, our office has received and reviewed more than 2,300 price gouging complaints.



Attorney General Stein sued and won \$150,000 in a price gouging lawsuit against Stephen Gould Corporation, a New Jersey-based business that allegedly pitched 7 million N95 masks to the North Carolina Emergency Management Unit of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, UNC Health, Duke Health, and the Charlotte Chapter of the American Red Cross at a markup of more than 100 percent. If the sales had been successful, the company would have profited more than \$30 million per transaction. As a result of the judgment Attorney General Stein obtained, the company is permanently barred from engaging in unfair and deceptive practices or selling personal protective equipment at unreasonably excessive prices.

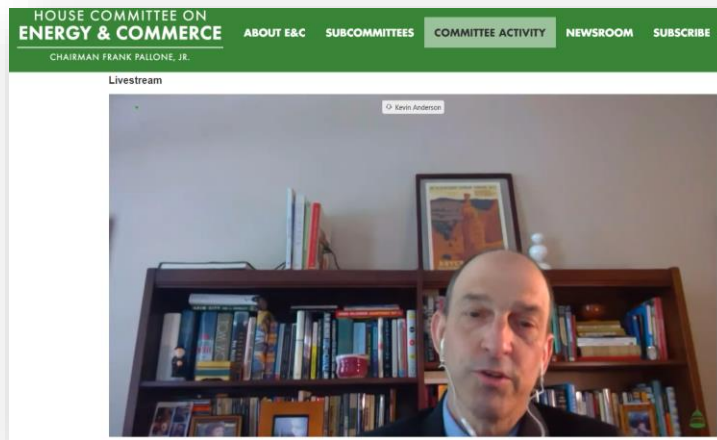


Attorney General Stein also obtained a preliminary injunction against Charlotte-based trucking company A1 Towing Solutions, Inc. and its owner after suing them for violating North Carolina's price gouging statute. The defendants allegedly improperly and predatorily booted or towed trucks that were delivering food, water, bleach, or needed medical supplies during the pandemic, even though the truck drivers had permission to park their trucks on the property. The defendants then allegedly forced drivers to pay excessive fees – up to \$4,400 – to regain access to their trucks. These actions delayed the delivery of critical supplies that people needed to respond to this crisis.

Preventing Coronavirus Scams

In addition to fighting price gouging, DOJ's Consumer Protection Division worked hard to protect North Carolinians from the upsurge in scams related to COVID-19. Our office shared alerts about door-to-door scammers, vaccine and miracle cure myths, new spins on grandparent and imposter scams, robocalls, federal recovery payments, small business loans, pandemic misinformation, online safety risks, and puppy scams.

In July, Kevin Anderson, Senior Deputy Attorney General and Director of the Consumer Protection Division, testified in front of the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce of the Committee on Energy and Commerce on pandemic-related scams and risks to North Carolinians.



NC Attorney General @NCAGO

🚨 **SCAM ALERT:** Scammers may be selling coronavirus testing kits/cleaning supplies door to door as both a scam and a pretense to enter your home. Don't open the door for anyone you don't know, and contact law enforcement if you're concerned for your safety. ncdoj.gov/consumer-alert...

CONSUMER ALERT

Be wary of door-to-door coronavirus scammers

Attorney General
Josh Stein

NC Attorney General @NCAGO · Jun 11, 2020

🚨 **CONSUMER ALERT** 🚨

As contact tracing ramps up in NC, it's important for all who are contacted to participate and help slow the spread of #COVID19.

Here's what to look for and how to avoid scams: ncdoj.gov/look-for-legit...

CONSUMER ALERT

Look for Legitimate COVID-19 Contact Tracers

THE PROGRESSIVE PULSE

Attorney General Stein: What you should know about potential coronavirus scams

By **Josh Stein** · March 11, 2020 · In **Commentary, COVID-19**

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Attorney General Josh Stein

Reports of the coronavirus are on the rise across the globe and even here in North Carolina. Unfortunately, a situation that creates fear also creates an opportunity for scammers. Let's not only prevent the spread of the virus, let's also prevent our loved ones from falling victim to scams. Here are some ways you can avoid coronavirus-related scams.

Don't fall for miracle cures. Scammers are offering products they claim are cures for the virus or will prevent you from getting sick. Per health officials, no such cure or vaccine exists – common-sense health precautions appear to be the way to protect yourself. Be skeptical of vaccinations, pharmaceuticals,

Easing Financial Hardships

Within days of the onset of the pandemic in early March, Attorney General Stein suspended all of DOJ's state debt collections efforts. The action stopped state agencies from issuing demand letters or attempting to collect on most debts owed to the state, including to public universities.

Attorney General Stein also worked with leading financial institutions to establish the Carolina Relief Plan. The effort elicited agreements from financial institutions to support customers who are facing COVID-19 financial hardships. Bank of America and the State Employees' Credit Union both joined the plan, giving their customers opportunities for payment extensions on loans, moratoriums on foreclosures, and access to additional financial assistance.

Attorney General Stein also pushed for changes at the federal level to help North Carolinians struggling under pandemic-related economic burdens, including relief for student loan borrowers, homeowners, and veterans.

Protecting Vulnerable North Carolinians

During statewide stay-at-home orders, many North Carolinians found themselves in vulnerable, increasingly stressful situations. That includes people living in unsafe conditions with an abuser or struggling with mental health disease or substance use disorder.

Attorney General Stein joined former North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley to help ensure that victims of domestic violence were able to seek emergency relief and protections from the court as quickly as possible.

The isolation of the pandemic put people with substance misuse disorders under heightened stress and a greater risk of overdose. Attorney General Stein shared new resources for people facing addiction, including ways to find treatment and recovery services during the pandemic and how people could support loved ones suffering from addiction. Attorney General Stein also released new resources for law enforcement officers responding to people struggling with substance misuse during the pandemic. These resources are available at www.MorePowerfulNC.org.



Defending Executive Orders

To respond to the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cooper has issued a number of executive orders to protect public health. Many of these orders required the consent of the Council of State. In that capacity, Attorney General Stein supported these efforts to reduce the spread of this deadly virus and to ameliorate its economic impacts. A number of these executive orders have been subsequently challenged in court, where DOJ lawyers have successfully defended their lawfulness.

FIGHTING CRIME

Criminal Division

NCDOJ's Criminal Division handles all criminal appeals and post-conviction litigation on behalf of the state of North Carolina, as well as certain prosecutions, criminal justice, and public safety cases.

Appellate and Post-Conviction Litigation

The Criminal Division's Appellate and Post-Conviction Section represents North Carolina in criminal cases being appealed before our state appellate courts, the North Carolina Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court of North Carolina, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court. The section also represents the state in federal habeas cases before the United States District Court, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2020, DOJ defended criminal convictions against 524 criminal appeals filed before the North Carolina appellate courts and 69 federal habeas actions filed before the United States district courts.

Special Prosecutions and Law Enforcement

In North Carolina, the ability to investigate or prosecute a crime belongs to the district attorneys elected to represent their communities. But sometimes, district attorneys reach out to DOJ's Special Prosecutions and Law Enforcement Section to handle the prosecution of cases that are complex or when conflicts of interest arise. In 2020, the section handled 106 special prosecutions cases.

These complex criminal cases often involve serious charges and actions that threaten the safety of individuals and their communities, such as homicide, sexual assault and violence, child abuse, and drug trafficking. For instance, in October 2020, the section obtained an aggravated second-degree murder conviction of a man for the 2016 death of his infant son.



The section also obtained bills of indictment for 29 counts of sexual offense charges against a Wilmington middle school teacher for alleged incidents that occurred between 1998 and 2019.

The section handles financial crime cases and won \$484,968.32 in judgments in tax revenue cases in 2020. The section also works with law enforcement partners on wiretaps and extraditions, handling 123 wiretap cases and 409 extraditions in 2020.

Public Safety

The Public Safety Section represents the North Carolina Department of Public Safety in litigation related to the operation and management of DPS institutions, including prisons, people incarcerated in DPS institutions, and DPS employees.

In 2020, the section handled more than 70 public safety cases, including a significant amount of litigation related to concerns about the coronavirus pandemic and the health and safety of incarcerated people.

Medicaid Investigations Division

The Medicaid Investigations Division (MID) investigates and prosecutes Medicaid-related fraud and abuse by health care companies and providers. MID also prosecutes crimes related to patient abuse and neglect in facilities that are funded by Medicaid.

Because Medicaid is a federal program that is administered by and jointly run with states, MID attorneys and staff work closely with various federal partners, including the U.S. Department of Justice, the FBI, the IRS, the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, as well as other states to handle Medicaid fraud cases.

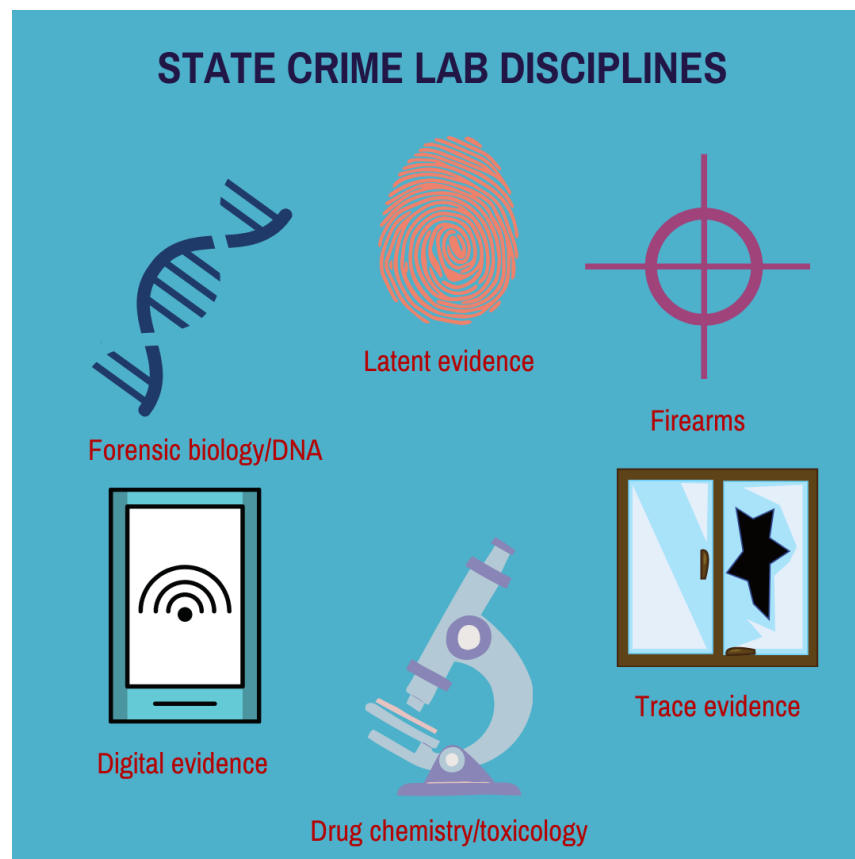
In 2020, MID closed 54 criminal cases, 66 civil cases, and 114 investigations. In all, the division recovered nearly \$20 million in Medicaid funding, settlements, and criminal and civil restitutions for the benefit of taxpayers.

The division won an \$8.8 million settlement with a Dunn physician and his practice for fraudulently submitting more than 40,000 claims to Medicare and Medicaid between 2010 and 2017. These claims were for services that were never actually completed for patients, as well as tests and studies that were medically unnecessary and improper.

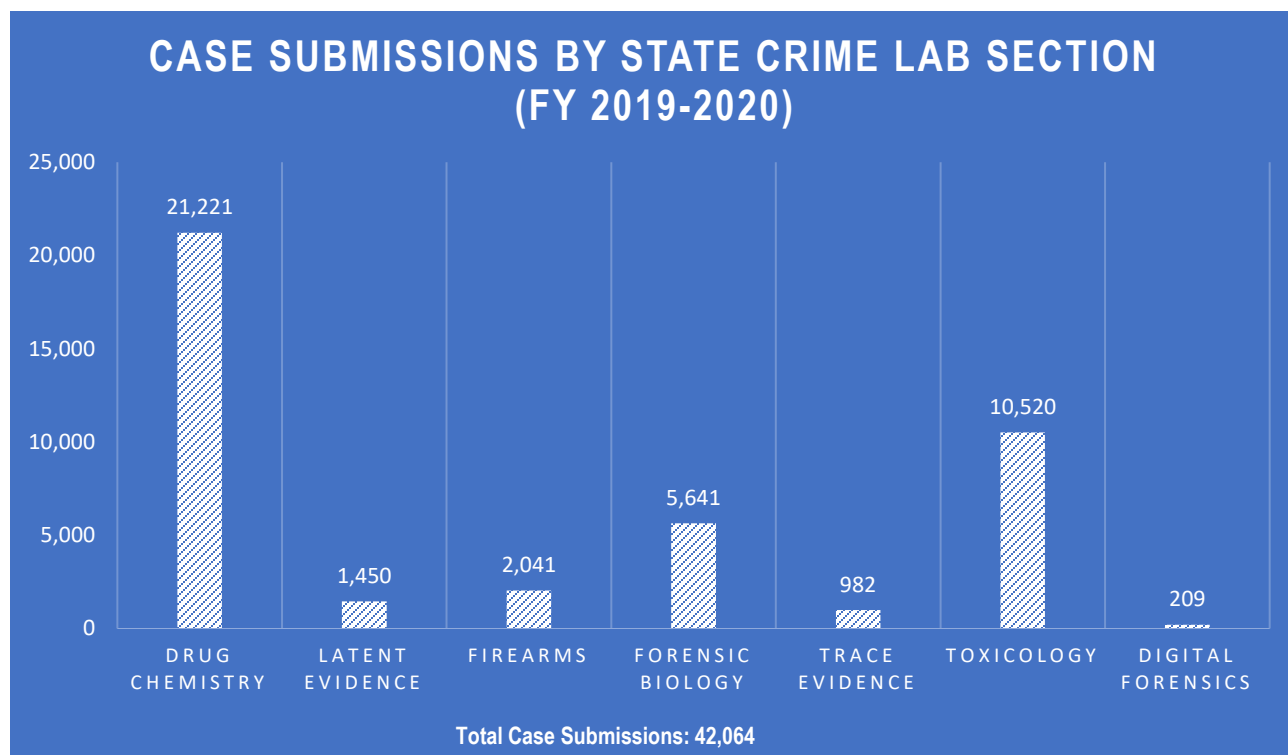
The division also won several convictions in a \$6.1 million Medicaid fraud scheme. From June 2015 to December 2017, Jerry and Tony Taylor submitted false claims to Medicaid through companies they owned and operated for at-risk youth in Monroe, Raleigh, and Gastonia. Jerry Taylor was sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay more than \$6 million in restitution and penalties. Tony Taylor was sentenced to 96 months in prison and also ordered to pay more than \$6 million in restitution and penalties. Two other co-conspirators have been sentenced as well, and a fifth awaits sentencing after pleading guilty.

State Crime Lab

The North Carolina State Crime Laboratory (SCL) is composed of three labs: a full-service lab in Raleigh, the Western Regional Laboratory in Hendersonville, and the Triad Regional Laboratory in Greensboro. The State Crime Lab provides forensic services at no cost to North Carolina's law enforcement agencies. Forensic scientists at the lab work in several different scientific disciplines highlighted below. They examine evidence, consult on evidence, and provide expert testimony in trials.



In Fiscal Year 2019-2020, the SCL accepted 42,064 submissions and completed 39,122 case records (a single case record can include more than one submission). A full overview of submissions and testing completed by the SCL is available in its FY 2019-2020 [annual report](#).



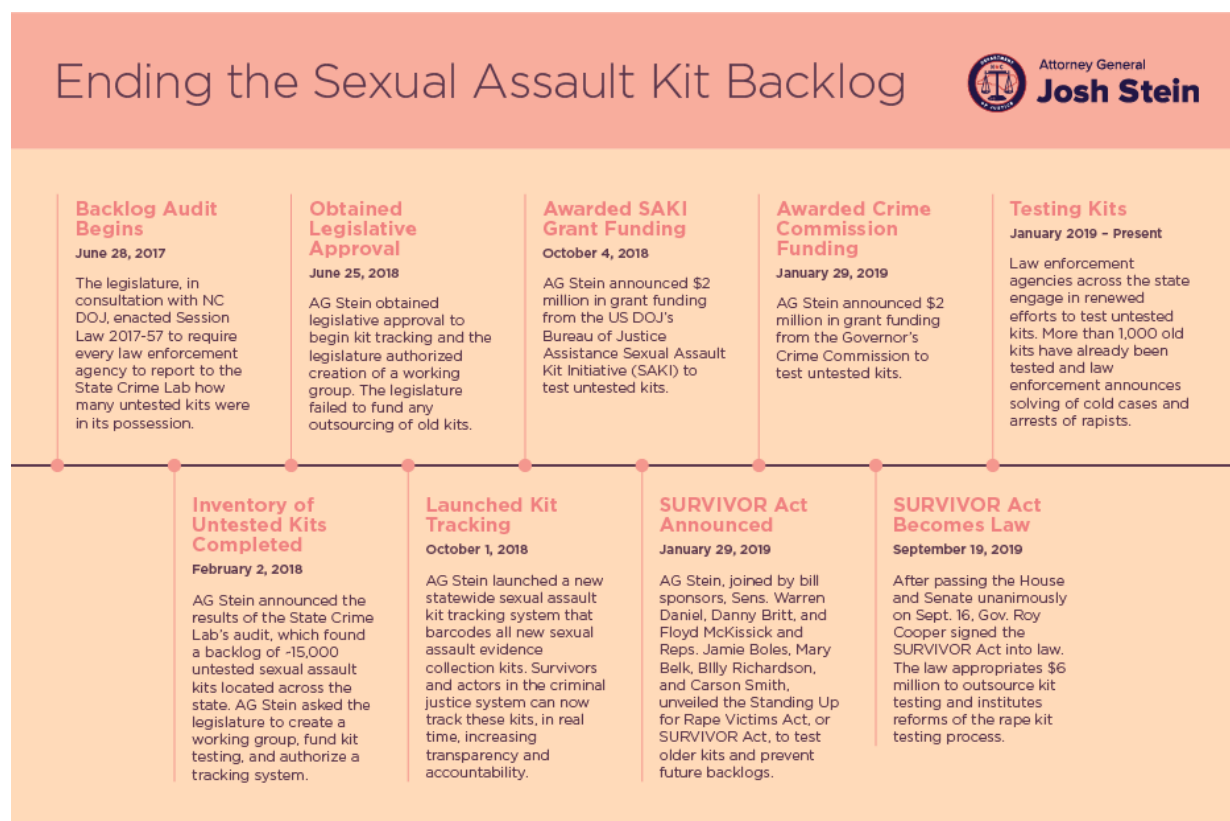
Our Work to Test Sexual Assault Kits and Promote Public Safety

In 2017, local law enforcement agencies completed an inventory of untested sexual assault kits in their custody. These untested kits went back years, and the lack of testing had hindered the ability to arrest rapists and get justice for victims and survivors of sexual assault in North Carolina.

The inventory led to several milestones in our office's work to make sure kits were tested and such a backlog never occurs again. In 2018, the SCL launched the Sexual Assault Evidence Collection and Kit Tracking and Inventory Management System (STIMS), a statewide tracking system that now includes an inventory of the older untested kits that were in local law enforcement custody as well as all newly-collected kits. Victims can now track the progress of the status of their kits throughout the criminal justice system.

In 2019, DOJ and the SCL secured a \$2 million Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. As part of this grant, the SCL worked with law enforcement agencies around the state to gather a certified inventory of previously untested sexual assault kits. Attorney General Stein also drafted and championed the Survivor Act, which the General Assembly enacted into law in 2019. As a part of the Survivor Act, the General Assembly provided \$6 million in funding for the outsourcing of the previously untested sexual assault kits. Of the 16,179 kits in the certified inventory, a total of 7,046 kits are in the process of being tested or have been tested. 890 cases have been entered into the state and national DNA databases. Forty-six percent of those cases had a hit to a known person in the database or to another case, allowing law enforcement to move the case forward.

The Survivor Act also requires that law enforcement agencies submit all reported and collected sexual assault kits to a laboratory for DNA testing. In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, 1,853 newly-collected kits were sent to the SCL for testing.



Testing kits isn't just about clearing out a backlog – these kits are tied to heinous crimes, and often contain the critical evidence that allows law enforcement investigations to link evidence to a suspect and get violent people off the street. In 2020, law enforcement was able to make significant progress in several cases. Fayetteville police were able to [make an arrest](#) in a 1992 sexual assault, Durham police [filed charges](#) against 11 people in connection with 15 sexual assault cases that dated back to 1984, and Asheville police [arrested a man](#) on rape and kidnapping charges in a 1992 sexual assault. As we continue to test these kits, we'll continue to solve violent crimes.

As we've tested these kits, we also looked for ways to continue to improve law enforcement investigations to improve our response to this terrible harm and ensure that the criminal justice and law enforcement systems can be accountable to victims and survivors. Kit testing has shown that many sexual assault incidents are preceded by earlier violence against women. In 2019, Fayetteville Police arrested the Ramsey Street serial rapist, Darold Wayne Bowden, who is charged with six rapes between 2006 and 2008. Bowden had been charged with domestic violence after the second sexual assault, and had his DNA been entered into the database at that time, he may have been identified and charged sooner. Attorney General Stein is asking the North Carolina General Assembly to update the law to require that the state collect the DNA of any person arrested for domestic violence and upload it to the state DNA database.

The North Carolina Justice Academy

The North Carolina Justice Academy offers training, provides technical assistance, and creates education and training materials for the state's criminal justice agencies, officers, and personnel. The Justice Academy provides instructions in five areas: legal, law enforcement leadership, commission and in-service, tactical and traffic, and investigations.

In 2020, the Justice Academy received a favorable report in support of reaccreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., which credentials law enforcement associations dedicated to public safety.

The top priority for the Justice Academy in 2020 was continuing the multi-year process revising the Basic Law Enforcement Training program. The Academy staff worked with subject matter experts from across North Carolina to develop new curriculum and update existing lesson plans based on a 2019 analysis completed by the Criminal Justice and Sheriffs' Standards Divisions. The draft lesson plans include content on topics such as crisis communication, procedural justice, police legitimacy, and problem-solving. The new BLET curriculum is set to begin piloting in January 2022, with a statewide rollout in January 2023.

While the Justice Academy operates on two state campuses – in Salemburg and Edneyville – the coronavirus pandemic pushed the academy to suspend in-person training and shift to online education for nearly four months of 2020. In July, the Academy resumed the delivery of Commission-mandated training courses in support of stakeholders.

- Courses offered: 447
 - In person: 315
 - Online: 132
- Online course completions: 180,543
- Number of bed nights spent on campus: 6,578
- Justice Academy students trained:
 - On-campus: 3,610
 - Off-campus: 945

The Justice Academy released a podcast to provide subject matter expertise and share agency successes on critical issues such as cold case investigations, procedural justice, the opioid epidemic, and human trafficking. The podcast series, [NCJA 10-14](#), is available via major podcast platforms, and supplements the Academy's training menu.

Law Enforcement Commissions

DOJ staffs two statewide law enforcement commissions that regulate law enforcement and criminal justice training standards, determine training and certification topics, and review individual violations of the rules: the Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and the Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commissions.

This year, both commissions supported the creation of the North Carolina Law Enforcement Accreditation (NCLEA) program, making North Carolina the 35th state to offer a state accreditation program. The

accreditation program required two years of planning and preparation, start-up funding from the Governor's Crime Commission, and the hiring of a program manager. The program is currently certifying agencies that meet the federal Safe Policing for Safe Communities standards. In 2021, it will begin offering state accreditation to agencies that voluntarily comply with a detailed set of standards.

Both commissions also supported the creation of a public [online database](#) that allows people to search for revocation and suspension information for sworn law enforcement officers in North Carolina. Both the Criminal Justice and Sheriffs' Standards Commissions may revoke or suspend an officer's certification after a finding that the officer committed or was convicted of a criminal offense or was in violation of some other Commission rule.

2020 Criminal Justice Standards at a Glance:

- Completed 141 investigations reviewed by Probable Cause Committee
- Certified 3,819 law enforcement officers
- Certified 2,479 corrections officers
- Certified 272 juvenile justice officers
- Certified 173 company/campus police
- Certified 1,636 general instructors
- Conducted 87 school audits
- Conducted 25 agency audits

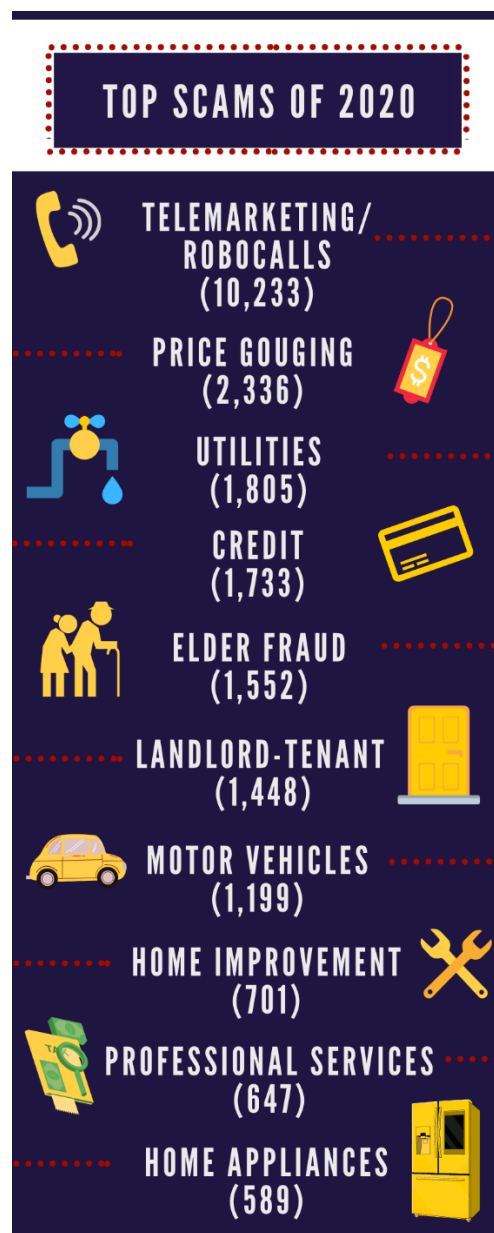
2020 Sheriffs' Standards at a Glance:

- Completed 146 investigations
- Swore in 878 new deputies
- Appointed 1,137 new detention officers
- Appointed 194 new telecommunicators
- Certified 430 school resource officers
- Certified 337 general and specialized instructors
- Conducted 96 agency audits

PROTECTING NORTH CAROLINA CONSUMERS

DOJ's Consumer Protection Division protects North Carolinians from scammers and bad actors who try to take people's hard-earned money through scams, cons, or deceptive and unfair business practices. Consumer protection attorneys and specialists review complaints about businesses, individuals, and sellers who may be defrauding people or violating consumer laws. Our office takes legal action against people who break the law and deceive North Carolinians and works to win back money or make sure that these companies don't harm North Carolinians in the future.

In 2020, the Consumer Protection Division received 31,019 consumer complaints, including more than 10,000 robocall and do not call complaints, 2,336 price gouging complaints, and 1,552 complaints related to fraud involving older individuals.



The division filed 11 consumer protection lawsuits, won 23 judgments and settlements with nearly \$65 million in restitution and recoveries, and won back close to \$1 million for consumers through informal mediation.

In 2020, the division secured 23 judgments and settlements, including:

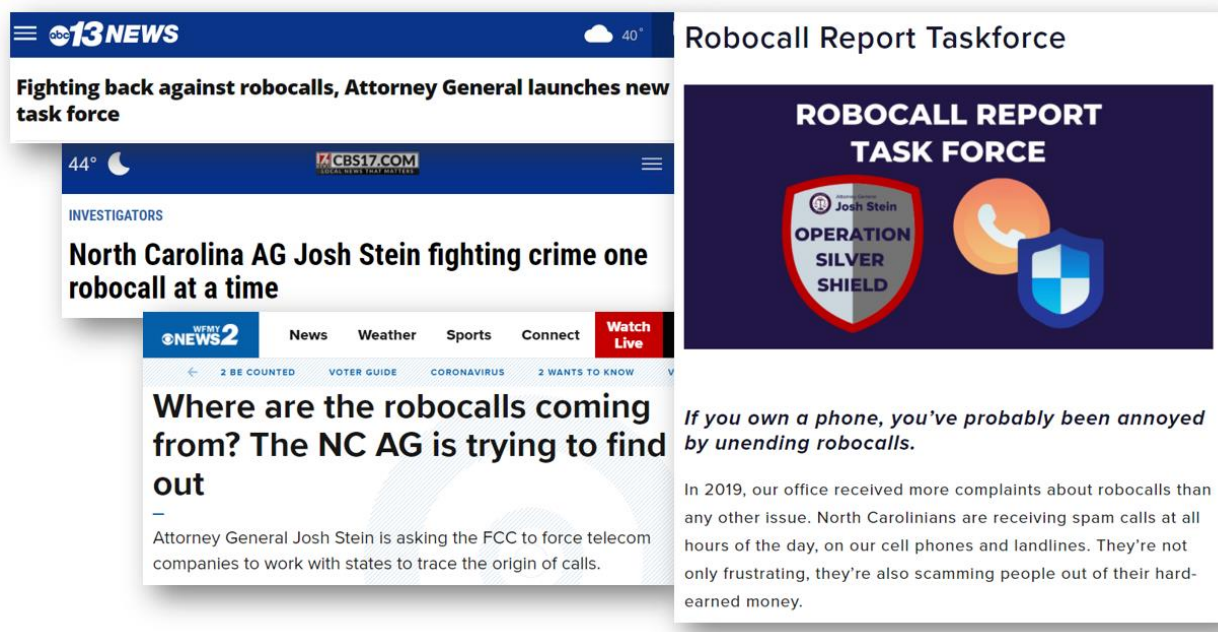
- a \$550 million multistate settlement with Santander, the nation's largest subprime auto financier for allegedly exposing subprime consumers to high risks and placing them in auto loans that were likely to default. North Carolina consumers will receive at least \$27,669,279 in relief.
- a bipartisan multistate settlement with private lender PEAKS Trust that will result in \$330 million in debt relief for former ITT Technical Institute students. 1,500 former students in North Carolina will receive \$12,048,741.50 in total loan forgiveness.
- a \$825,000 settlement against Florida-based payday lender Approved Financial for unlawfully operating without a license in North Carolina and making more than 400 online loans to North Carolinians at interest rates between 78 and 252 percent - far exceeding North Carolina's 30 percent interest rate limit. Nearly 400 North Carolinians will get full refunds or have their outstanding loans cancelled, and the company is now permanently enjoined from doing business in North Carolina in violation of the law.
- a \$68,000 consent judgment against auto body shop defendants for allegedly using information from police reports to pretend they were from a person's insurance company and take possession of their cars until the owners paid fees.
- a \$122,000 judgment against Charlotte-area repairman John Jackson and his companies that bans Jackson from doing appliance repair work in the state after he used multiple names and aliases to perpetrate a scheme over bogus appliance repairs.
- a \$160,000 consent judgment against Auto Houses of Mooresville and Salisbury and its owners that bans the defendants from engaging in motor vehicle dealership businesses in North Carolina for perpetrating motor vehicle scams.
- a \$122,000 consent judgment with George Edward Hall II and his companies over a contracting scheme that involved taking money from consumers while failing to complete construction and repair work.

In addition to the coronavirus-related price gouging judgments (see page 10), Attorney General Stein also reached a \$100,000 settlement with an Idaho water damage restoration company over a Hurricane Florence price gouging investigation. Since 2018, Attorney General Stein has brought nine lawsuits against 25 defendants under North Carolina's price gouging statute. He has obtained nine judgments against 18 defendants, including a \$274,000 settlement that was the largest price gouging settlement in the department's history. DOJ has won more than \$975,000 in these judgments and settlements.

Shutting Down Robocallers

In February, Attorney General Stein launched Operation Silver Shield, a department-wide effort to confront scammers who target older North Carolinians through consumer protection and education, Medicaid investigations, and robocall actions. Because so many scams originate through robocalls, Attorney General Stein created the Robocall Report Task Force and asked North Carolinians to report robocallers through a detailed web form (www.ncdoj.gov/norobo) and dedicated robo-report hotline (1-844-8-NO-ROBO).

In 2020, people reported nearly 10,000 robocalls to our office. While robocalls and illegal telemarketing calls can be hard to track down and stop, these robocall reports help us identify patterns in scams that we can warn consumers about and help us work with state and federal partners to identify technological solutions to prevent people from receiving these calls.

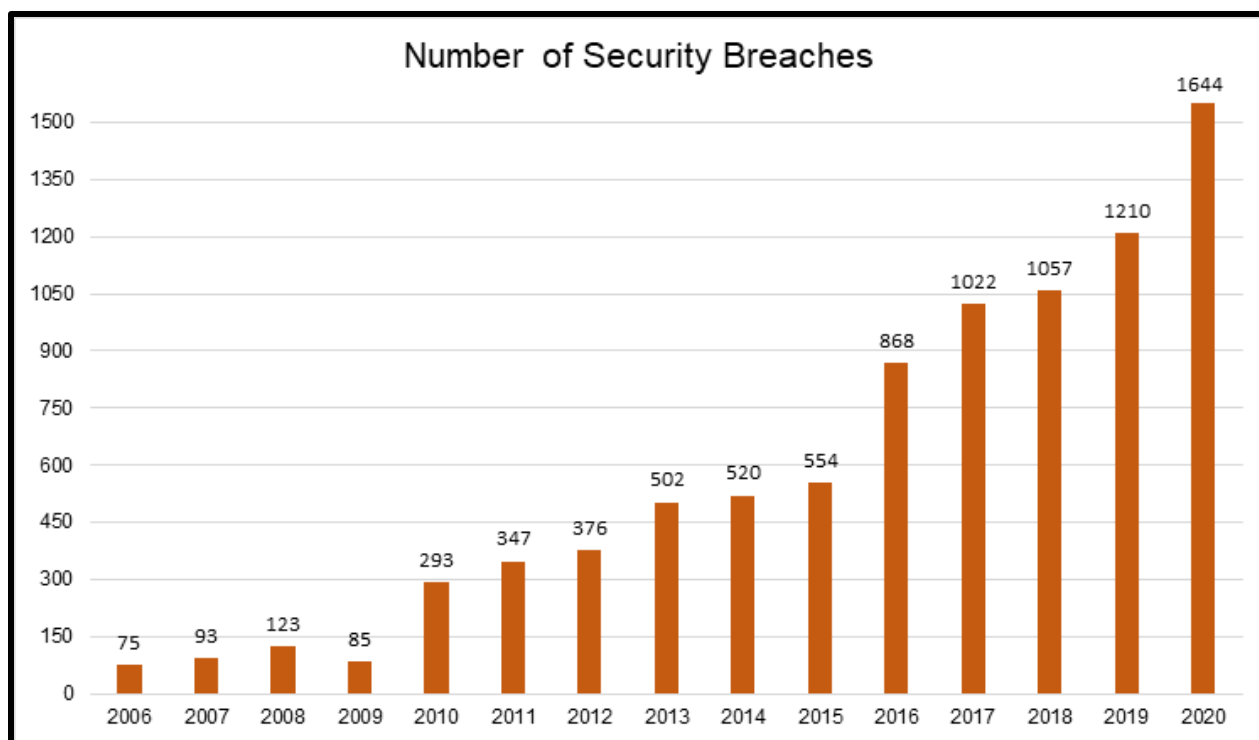


Attorney General Stein reached a \$210 million settlement with Dish Network for engaging in illegal nationwide telemarketing that violated do-not-call laws. North Carolina will receive \$13,986,000 – the largest penalty ever obtained in state history over such violations. The funds will go to North Carolina’s public schools, and Attorney General Stein has urged the legislature to use these funds to expand broadband access in North Carolina’s underserved regions.

Attorney General Stein also co-led two multistate bipartisan coalitions of attorneys general in filing briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court to block robocall loopholes and uphold robocall protections. He also sued Texas robocallers who allegedly made more than 75 million robocalls to North Carolina phone users, including more than 34 million calls to numbers on the national Do Not Call Registry.

Protecting Our Privacy and Choice Online

In North Carolina, companies and state agencies are required to report data breach violations to DOJ. In 2020, DOJ received 1,644 notices that impacted more than 1.1 million North Carolinians. This represents more data breach notifications than ever.



The division reached a \$39.5 million multistate data breach settlement with Anthem over a 2014 data breach that compromised the information of 775,606 North Carolinians, as well as a \$17.5 million multistate settlement with Home Depot over a data breach that exposed the financial data of nearly 40 million customers.

Attorney General Stein also filed two significant antitrust lawsuits against Google and Facebook over allegations that these tech companies have taken illegal steps to maintain monopolies over online search and social media, respectively. The lawsuit against Facebook alleges that it used its monopoly power to buy competitors and cut services to others to maintain its monopoly, which ultimately harms people by reducing privacy protections, degrading services, and stifling competition. The lawsuit against Google alleges that it used anticompetitive exclusionary contracts and conduct to illegally maintain a monopoly over search engines and related advertising markets. In both lawsuits, Attorney General Stein and bipartisan coalitions of attorneys general are asking the courts to stop the illegal, anticompetitive conduct and restore more competitive marketplaces.

The internet is the critical infrastructure of our time, and we need healthy competition in the tech industry. In 2020, we've increasingly relied on online platforms and tools to replace so many of the in-person functions we could no longer do and to stay connected with the people we love. We need tech companies to play by the rules and allow for the competition that leads to technological innovations and advances that benefit us and allow us better choices and the ability to demand greater protections over our privacy and data.

PROTECTING THE STATE

Attorney General Stein and DOJ represent the state government, including its agencies, boards, commissions, employees, and taxpayers, in court. We also take action to defend North Carolina's interests on behalf of its people.

**As of October 2020,
DOJ is defending the
constitutionality of
North Carolina laws
in 529 cases.**



Keeping Our Air, Water, and Land Clean

At DOJ, our job is to protect the people of North Carolina – and that includes making sure that we have clean air to breathe and water to drink. At a time when we should be focused on expanding the clean energy economy, creating green jobs, and fighting climate change, too many critically necessary protections were rolled back by the federal government. In 2020, our Environmental Division represented the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in legal actions, and Attorney General Stein and our office stood up for North Carolina against actions that hurt our environment.

Contamination caused by chemicals, including the forever chemical PFAS, damages our natural resources and hurts North Carolinians living in affected areas. In August, Attorney General Stein launched a formal investigation into those responsible for PFAS contamination in North Carolina. Our office filed a lawsuit against DuPont/Chemours to hold them accountable for the damage their manufacture, use, and disposal of PFAS chemicals have caused around their Fayetteville Works Facility, in the Cape Fear River, and in downstream water supplies, fisheries, and other natural resources. This action is the first case Attorney General Stein has brought as a result of that ongoing investigation, which may result in additional legal action. The lawsuit asks the court to require DuPont and Chemours to relinquish profits it made from transactions related to this contamination and void corporate transactions that have shielded the companies' assets from the state.

In addition to this landmark investigation and litigation, the Environment Division closed more than 101 cases and multiple appeals. It:

- reached a settlement over penalties and costs levied by DEQ against the Southern Resin chemical plant over the accidental release of certain regulated substances that may cause death or harm.
- successfully defended more than \$168,000 in penalties against Zimmer Development Co. for stream standards, stormwater, and sedimentation violations during the development of the Western Carolina University Millennial Campus apartments and filed a complaint for injunctive relief that resulted in site-wide cleanup and regulatory compliance.
- continued to defend DEQ against challenges to new environmentally protective permit conditions for animal operations.
- finalized a historic settlement for the closure of all of Duke Energy's coal ash impoundments that had caused decades of contamination of North Carolina's surface water and groundwater – requiring the largest excavation and remediation of coal ash in our nation's history.
- administered the Attorney General's Environmental Enhancement Grant Program, which awarded and distributed nearly \$7.5 million to 49 grantees in 2020.

Our office sued the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies to prevent rollbacks of decades of environmental protections under the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act that have served to protect North Carolinians' health and North Carolina's environment. We also filed a lawsuit challenging the EPA's final rule gutting standards that limit emissions of methane, volatile organic compounds, and other hazardous pollutants from the oil and natural gas industry. We sued challenging Trump administration changes to the legal definition of Waters of the United States (WOTUS), which, if allowed to stand, would remove protections from much of our critically important wetlands that filter out pollutants and provide clean drinking water, reduce the risk of flooding on our coast, and allow our agricultural and coastal economies to thrive. When the EPA and Trump administration failed to protect our environment, we took action to protect North Carolina and its people.

North Carolinians have made their views crystal clear: We do not want drilling off our coast. If allowed, offshore drilling would damage our coastal fishing and tourism industries. That's why Attorney General Stein fought against the Trump administration's repeated efforts to allow it. Our office will continue to litigate against efforts to override North Carolina's ability to manage and protect its own coastal resources.

Department of Health and Human Services

Health and Human Services (HHS) attorneys represent the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), work to prevent fraud and program abuse, and protect vulnerable North Carolinians, including children, older people, and people in need of mental health support and treatment.

In 2020, the HHS Division:

- Closed 955 Medicaid cases.
- Closed 49 child care/welfare cases.
- Closed nine health care personnel registry cases to stop unlicensed health care workers with histories of abuse, neglect, misappropriation, fraud, or drug diversion from caring for vulnerable North Carolinians.
- Resolved 78 adult care licensure and mental health licensure and certification cases to protect some of North Carolina's most fragile residents.

- Fought for and successfully certified \$1,072,663 for collection in delinquent child support for children who are entitled to child support payments.
- Assisted in the collection of \$29,155,233 from individuals and entities owing money to the Medicaid program.

HHS attorneys successfully shut down three psychiatric adolescent residential treatment facilities where teens with mental health issues were found to be abused and neglected. Because of teamwork and innovative ideas from HHS attorneys and NCDHHS, these facilities will soon reopen with new executive leadership, thus ensuring the health and safety of teens with mental illness and preserving \$2 million in federal grant money for the state.

Attorneys also successfully defended the license revocation of two substance abuse treatment providers that exploited clients by offering substandard housing to the homeless in exchange for billing Medicaid for drug treatment services which were not needed or provided. Their work helped ensure the health, safety, and welfare of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Public health and child welfare attorneys successfully defended the constitutionality of a child welfare statute designed to protect minors from abuse, neglect, and dependency.

Public assistance and child welfare attorneys continued to provide training to social workers throughout North Carolina on legal tools available to protect disabled and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation and to protect children from abuse, neglect, and dependency.

DOJ also devoted substantial resources to defend NCDHHS and its selection of insurers that will administer the Medicaid standard pre-paid health plans as part of the transformation to Medicaid managed care. Attorneys also spent the past year successfully negotiating and defending NCDHHS' selection criteria for individuals with behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disabilities who will be served by the Medicaid managed care tailored plans.

Protecting the health of North Carolinians during COVID-19

HHS attorneys worked tirelessly at the onset of the pandemic to assist NCDHHS and the governor's office with developing and enacting executive orders to ensure that North Carolina had a sufficient hospital capacity and supply of health care workers, available essential childcare services, and continuation of critical mental health, developmental disability and substance abuse services, social services programs, and programs for the elderly.

Health service attorneys coordinated with the Division of Health Service Regulation and health care trade associations to identify potential legal impediments to a swift and effective response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. They reviewed hundreds of rules and statutes and identified and drafted critical waivers and/or modifications that enabled hospitals to accommodate potential patient surge, reduced administrative burdens so providers could focus on patient care, and removed staffing barriers so providers would have the necessary workforce to respond to the pandemic. They also drafted numerous informational directives to ensure health care providers understood the waivers and modifications and were able to protect the health, safety, and welfare of patients, residents and staff in North Carolina's health care facilities.

Public health and public assistance attorneys spent countless hours researching and drafting enforcement letters and imminent hazard abatement orders issued by NCDHHS to various entities, such as speedways, amusement parks, and entertainment venues that continued to endanger the public's health, safety, and welfare by operating in violation of the governor's executive orders during the pandemic. Attorneys also took legal action in court when necessary to enforce these orders.

Child welfare attorneys worked with NCDHHS to ensure continued services for children and families. They developed guidance for county departments of social services to allow for the uninterrupted provision of child protective services, worked with our federal and state court partners to prioritize cases for children in the abuse, neglect, and dependency court system, and ensured online trainings were developed so social workers in the child welfare workforce were able to meet required training requirements.

Attorneys also assisted with the drafting and adoption of crucial emergency rules, including rules to preserve vital drug supplies during the pandemic and rules requiring assisted living facilities to implement infection prevention and control programs to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. DOJ attorneys also served on teams responsible for vetting offers for the sale of critical PPE to our state.

Department of Information Technology

Attorneys representing the Department of Information Technology (DIT) provide legal advice to DIT to help ensure that the IT contracts that agencies enter are competitive, enforceable, and provide the best value for the state. The group recently edited the state's RFP template to better protect the state if litigation arises out of any IT contracts. In 2020, attorneys representing DIT also drafted a protective order to establish IT security measures to protect confidential electronic information that was ordered by a court to be produced by multiple state agencies. Attorneys also reviewed several time-sensitive IT purchases, including a contract between the State Board of Elections and a vendor to provide scanners during the November elections and a contract between NCDHHS and a vendor for the development of an app to track the spread of COVID-19. DOJ attorneys also continue to advise the 911 Board during a time when it is most important for our 911 call centers to operate appropriately and efficiently.

Department of State Treasurer

The DOJ legal team representing the Department of State Treasurer (DST) successfully defended DST in its efforts to safeguard the solvency of the pension and State Health Plan trust funds and protect citizens. Attorneys won rulings that:

- upheld the Retirement System Division's (RSD) enforcement of a forfeiture statute that RSD utilized to greatly reduce the pension of a former elected official who embezzled state funds.
- upheld the State Health Plan's authority to collect its statutory lien on third party personal injury settlements.
- secured a civil judgment for more than \$280,000 against a former state employee who improperly received pension funds from RSD.
- defended the Unclaimed Property Division in its enforcement of the statutory restrictions placed on property finders to ensure that property finders deal fairly with citizens seeking to recover their unclaimed property.

Services to State Agencies

A team of attorneys within the Services to State Agencies Section, along with attorneys in the Criminal Division, continue to defend the Sex Offender Registry laws to protect citizens. At least two of these cases have been dismissed.

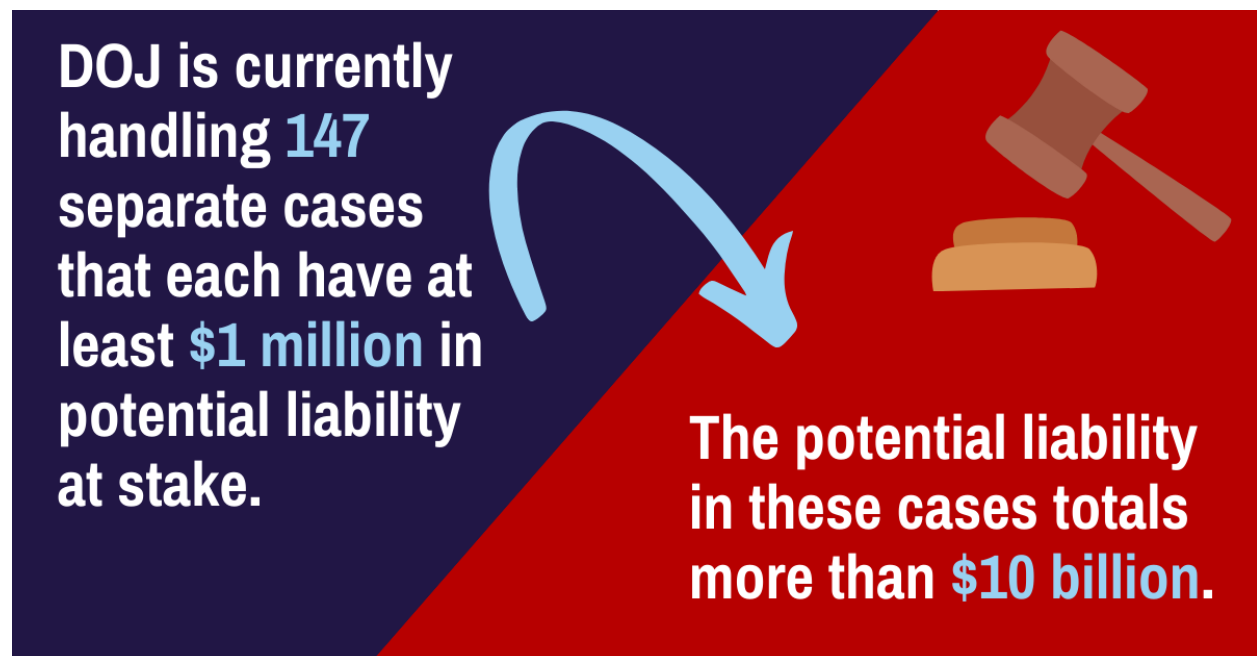
Administrative Office of the Courts

Attorneys representing the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) defeated a motion to treble damages against AOC in a whistleblower action. This ruling, consistent with case law, appropriately protects the state and the taxpayers from having to pay triple the damages for the improper actions of an individual.

Department of Transportation

Lawyers representing the Department of Transportation closed more than 236 condemnation cases, one employment case, 17 Map Act cases, and three additional cases. The section also closed 25 cases involving motor vehicles administration actions, title actions, civil litigation, and personnel cases.

The Contract Claims and Administration Section within the division reached a favorable resolution for NCDOT that was \$25 million less than the filed construction claim in a document-intensive case filed in the Office of Administrative Hearings.



Office of the Solicitor General

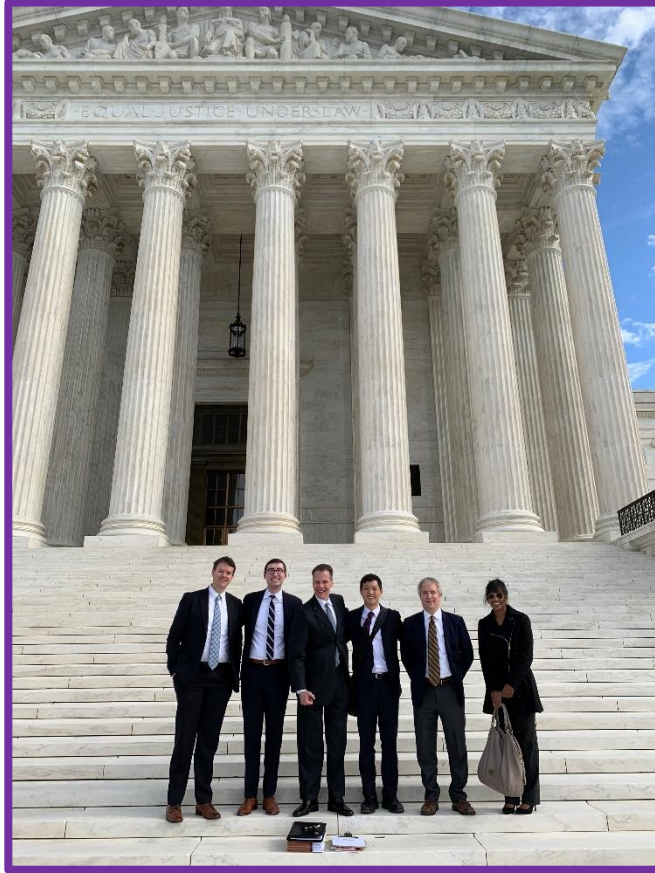
DOJ's Office of Solicitor General oversees our office's civil appeals and handles many of our most complex and significant cases, including cases at the U.S. Supreme Court. It also provides advice to the Attorney General on challenging legal policy issues.



Solicitor General Ryan Park

Attorney General Stein welcomed a new Solicitor General, Ryan Park, to the role this year. Ryan previously served as a deputy to Solicitor General Matt Sawchak, who held the role from 2017 until March 2020. During his time at DOJ, Matt successfully defended multiple state agencies and officials on appeal in one of the largest class actions in state history and represented the Department of Revenue in a groundbreaking constitutional tax dispute at the U.S. Supreme Court.

In March, the Solicitor General's office earned a win at the U.S. Supreme Court in *Allen v. Cooper*, a case that relates to the ongoing work by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to recover, preserve, and educate the public about Blackbeard's flagship, the Queen Anne's Revenge, which sunk off the coast of North Carolina more than three centuries ago. The Solicitor General's office successfully argued the case, reaffirming that all states retain certain core aspects of sovereignty, including sovereign immunity from copyright lawsuits.



DOJ team pictured left to right, post arguments in Allen v. Cooper at the U.S. Supreme Court: Chief of Staff Seth Dearmin, Assistant Solicitor General Nick Brod, former Solicitor General Matt Sawchak, Solicitor General Ryan Park, General Counsel Swain Wood, and Deputy General Counsel Priya Narasimhan

The office also played a key role in helping to defend Gov. Cooper's emergency measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Working in partnership with several divisions across the department, the office helped lead the overall legal strategy against numerous lawsuits in federal and state court. It also successfully handled several key matters directly, including by securing dismissal of a lawsuit that sought to disable Gov. Cooper's overall authority to respond to statewide emergencies like a pandemic.

In 2020, the office also:

- led broad and bipartisan coalitions of states in two cases in the U.S. Supreme Court defending laws banning robocalls and other types of telephone fraud and abuse.
- represented Attorney General Stein, on behalf of the state, and Gov. Cooper in a landmark case in which the North Carolina Court of Appeals held that persons in same-sex relationships have an equal right to a domestic-violence protection order.
- successfully defended emergency measures instituted by the North Carolina State Board of Elections to ensure that the fall election could be administered in a safe and secure manner.
- led the department's efforts, with the Consumer Protection Division and external consumer advocates, to obtain reversal of orders of the North Carolina Utilities Commission that required consumers to bear an unfair share of Duke Energy's coal-ash costs.

LGBTQ people can finally get domestic violence protections in NC, court rules

BY WILL DORAN

DECEMBER 31, 2020 11:51 AM, UPDATED

Attorney General Josh Stein and Gov. Roy Cooper, both Democrats, had previously called the law unconstitutional and signed briefs supporting the plaintiff in this case.

LGBTQ people in North Carolina can no longer be prevented from getting domestic violence protective orders, the N.C. Court of Appeals ruled Thursday.

WRAL.com

Who pays for Duke Energy's coal ash cleanup? NC Supreme Court weighs in - sort of

Posted December 11, 2020 4:28 p.m. EST

Updated January 26, In a statement, Stein called the Supreme Court's decision

By Travis Fain, WRAL "a major win for electricity consumers on coal ash cleanup costs."

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina regulators will take a fresh look at Duke Energy electricity rates after a state Supreme Court decision Friday that could shift coal ash cleanup costs from customers to company shareholders.

CAROLINA Public Press

ELECTION 2020

Supreme Court upholds NC ballot acceptance extension

Postmarked NC ballots submitted through the mail on time will still be counted if the Postal Service does its job by Nov. 12.

by Jordan Wilkie • October 29, 2020



In a win for the N.C. State Board of Elections and voter advocacy groups, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in a 5-3 vote Wednesday not to take up the appeal challenging the deadline extension for accepting by-mail absentee ballots.

Josh Stein, North Carolina's attorney general, called Voters still need to have t this a "huge win" that gives "certainty that every ballots in the mail and po eligible vote will be counted." or submit them in person by 5 p.m. on Election Day.

EDUCATING AND ASSISTING NORTH CAROLINIANS

Protecting the Public

The Public Protection Section works to prevent crime and support victims and survivors by identifying policies that increase accountability and better serve North Carolinians. The section also works to protect people from being victims of scams and frauds by providing presentations and educational materials about the latest tactics that scammers are using to take people's hard-earned money. While members of the section couldn't travel to speak with North Carolina communities in 2020, they still held more than 70 online presentations and addressed more than 1,600 people.

The section also led much of the office's work on the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, which Attorney General Stein co-chairs. Members of the section also serve on the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, the Domestic Violence Commission, the Human Trafficking Commission, the North Carolina Senior Consumer Fraud Task Force, the Financial Literacy Council, and the State Reentry Council Collaborative.



Public Protection Section Director and Special Deputy Attorney General Jasmine McGhee participated in a WRAL roundtable discussion about policing and equality in September.

The section also includes the Open Government Unit, which helps public officials and the public navigate public records and open meetings laws and ensures that elected officials and government employees conduct their work in an open manner as required by law. In 2020, the unit handled 161 open meeting and information requests.

Sexual Assault Kit Initiative

In partnership with the State Crime Lab, the Public Protection Section worked to administer the \$2 million grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI). In addition to testing previously untested kits in local law enforcement custody, the grant is being used to help ensure that sexual

assault investigations and prosecutions are supportive of and transparent to victims and survivors of sexual assault. The section worked to help drive the formation of multidisciplinary teams to review and create a testing priority for older kits, develop guidance on kit testing for local law enforcement, create best practices to notify victims of hits on their cases, and educate law enforcement and criminal justice on new protocols to further victim-centered investigations and prosecutions.

In 2020, the section held 22 events and trained 474 law enforcement officers and advocates on sexual assault investigations. Learn more about this work [here](#).

Lethality Assessment Protocol

In 2019, the section collaborated with the Justice Academy and the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence to launch the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) initiative to save victims of domestic violence. The program is an effort between law enforcement officers and domestic violence service providers to act at a critical moment to protect victims of domestic violence who are at risk of being killed by their domestic partner.



Attorney General Josh Stein unveils the Lethality Assessment Program to help victims of domestic violence.

In 2020, the section worked with law enforcement and service providers to hold six events and train 77 officers and advocates on the Lethality Assessment Program.

Responding to Constituent Concerns

DOJ's constituent response team works to help answer questions from North Carolinians who are seeking assistance, sharing their concerns, or looking for additional guidance or the correct agency to respond to their questions. This includes responding to postal mail, email, and phone calls to our office. In 2020, our office handled nearly 23,000 messages from constituents on issues including public safety, election guidance referrals, pandemic response questions, and general thoughts and feedback on the office's work.

STANDING UP FOR NORTH CAROLINIANS

Students

Higher education is a major financial investment, and students should not be financially exploited when they invest in their futures. That's why Attorney General Stein is committed to cracking down on fraudulent student loan relief groups, taking on for-profit colleges that scam families, target veterans, and cheat consumers, and help students get a fresh start on their educational and financial futures. This includes pushing back when the U.S. Department of Education tries to repeal crucial rules. Our office took Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to court to preserve the Gainful Employment Rule, which holds for-profit institutions accountable for the future success of their students.

Students need to feel safe as they invest in their education. That's why Attorney General Stein spoke out against the U.S. Department of Education and Secretary DeVos when they failed to keep students safe from violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination on college campuses. In June, our office filed a complaint against the Trump administration's new restrictions on Title IX regulations, which weaken protections for sexual assault and harassment victims in schools and colleges. Our office will continue to fight rules that fail to protect students from sexual assault and harassment.

Census

An accurate census count is critical to our state—it's how North Carolina ensures we get our fair share of federal representation and resources. When the Trump administration tried to end the census count early, jeopardizing North Carolina's full participation, Attorney General Stein pushed back. As people navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important that they have enough time to be counted.

When the Trump administration attempted to illegally politicize the census by restricting the count, Attorney General Stein filed a lawsuit to block it. The Constitution is abundantly clear: For purposes of apportioning members of the House of Representatives among the states, every person residing in the U.S. during the census, regardless of legal status, must be counted. Our office will keep fighting to ensure that our state is counted fairly and gets its full share of federal funding and representation.

DACA

America is a nation of immigrants, and thousands of immigrants in North Carolina contribute to our communities and our economy. North Carolina is home to approximately 24,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) grantees, or Dreamers, and there are approximately 825,000 DACA recipients across the country. These individuals came to the country as children and were granted DACA status after paying application fees, submitting to and passing background checks, and applying for work permits. DACA grantees contribute more than \$80.3 million annually in state and local taxes in North Carolina.

When the status of the Dreamers was in jeopardy, our office stepped in to protect those who live in North Carolina and rely on that law. And we won – in June, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the Trump administration's plan to dismantle DACA. Our office continues to defend challenges to DACA, ensuring that Dreamers can continue to live and work freely in our communities.

Voters

In 2020, Attorney General Stein and DOJ worked to ensure that the elections could be safely administered during a pandemic and that every eligible voter was able to cast their vote safely and securely. Our office defended the State Board of Elections' COVID-19 response to election administration to ensure that voters could vote safely by mail or in person during the early voting period and on Election Day. This included allowing voters to cure absentee ballots with minor errors so their votes would still be counted and extending the deadline for county boards of elections to receive ballots that were postmarked on or before Election Day.

Attorney General Stein also [sued](#) the U.S. Postal Service and the Postmaster General for undermining the timely delivery of mail with their operational changes, especially during an election season when more Americans voted by mail than ever before because of the pandemic. As a result of Attorney General Stein's lawsuit, a federal court ordered the Postal Service to reverse many of these unlawful changes that slowed mail delivery. The ability to send and deliver mail on time is critical to our elections, our businesses, and our rural communities.

As a result of these efforts, North Carolina had the highest voter turnout – 75.4 percent – in recent history. More than 5.5 million North Carolinians cast their vote and more than one million of those votes were cast by mail to help keep people safe.

RECOGNIZING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Each year, Attorney General Stein recognizes North Carolinians who are dedicated to keeping people safe, healthy, and happy in their communities with the Attorney General's Dogwood Award. This year, 27 recipients earned the Dogwood. The recipients worked to address issues that make North Carolina safer and stronger, including bringing justice to victims of sexual assault, fighting addiction, protecting our environment, making the criminal justice system fairer, and improving people's health.

The 2020 Dogwood Award Honorees were:

- Randy Abbott, volunteer coordinator, SAFE Project, Greensboro
- Sheriff Charles Blackwood, Orange County Sheriff's Office, Hillsborough
- Dr. Carly Brown, Masks of Love, Asheville
- District Attorney Ben David, New Hanover & Pender County District Attorney's Office, Wilmington
- District Attorney Satana Deberry, Durham County District Attorney's Office, Durham
- Christian Dueñas, DACA recipient and advocate, Durham
- Bishop Todd Fulton, Mt. Moriah Outreach Center, Kernersville
- Peter Gilbert, Legal Aid of North Carolina, Durham
- Peter Gwaltney, North Carolina Bankers Association, Wake Forest
- Hayley Harris and Lara Purnell, Layers of Dignity, Raleigh
- Chief Mark Holtzman, Greenville Police Department, Greenville
- Mayor Vi Lyles, Charlotte
- Beth Messersmith, MomsRising, Durham
- Mike Reardon, Carolina Climbers Association, Asheville
- Sec. Michael Regan, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, Raleigh
- Sheriff Danny Rogers, Guilford County Sheriff's Office, Greensboro
- Rep. Carson Smith, District 16, Hampstead
- Jessie Smith, UNC School of Government, Chapel Hill
- Principal Chief Richard Sneed, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee
- Sheriff Keith Stone, Nash County Sheriff's Office, Nashville
- Isaac Sturgill, Legal Aid of North Carolina, Charlotte
- Frank Timberlake, Rich Square Market, Rich Square
- Dr. Ogugua Ndili Obi, Vidant Health, Greenville
- Wendy Mateo-Pascual, Latinx community advocate, Concord
- Dr. Anuradha Rao-Patel, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, Durham
- Amy Upham, Buncombe County Opioid Response Coordinator, Asheville

CONCLUSION

Last year was a year unlike any other in our lifetimes. It presented unprecedented hardships and challenges for people across the state. Attorney General Stein is incredibly proud of his colleagues at the DOJ for adapting to new and radically different work situations to continue serving and protecting the people of North Carolina. They rose to the challenge in 2020 and look forward to continuing this important work in the year to come.