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Fugitive Safe Surrender Sets New Record: Nearly 5,000 Peacefully Surrendered to Resolve Approximately 10,000 Nonviolent Warrants

Striking Turnout Makes FSS-Jersey City the Largest Such Event Held in New Jersey, Third-Largest in the Nation



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JERSEY CITY – New Jersey Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman today announced that a record-breaking total of 4,587 individuals voluntarily and peacefully turned themselves in at Fugitive Safe Surrender, to resolve an estimated total of approximately 10,000 nonviolent criminal and civil warrants between Wednesday, November 6 and Saturday, November 9 at Evangelismos Church in Jersey City.

This striking result represents the highest turnout of all five Fugitive Safe Surrender events held so far in New Jersey. (The previous record was set at New Jersey's second FSS event, held 2009 in Newark). With this event, a total of nearly 18,000 individuals have turned themselves in at New Jersey's five Fugitive Safe Surrender opportunities.

The FSS event in Jersey City also had the third-highest turnout of the 26 Fugitive Safe Surrender events held nationwide since 2005, surpassed only by those held in the much larger cities of Cleveland (where 7,200 fugitives surrendered in 2010) and Detroit (where 6,578 surrendered in 2008).

“This Fugitive Safe Surrender event was a tremendous, record-breaking success that will touch thousands of lives for the better – not just the nearly 5,000 individuals who surrendered, but the lives of their loved ones and fellow New Jerseyans,” Acting Attorney General Hoffman said. “By offering favorable consideration, not amnesty, New Jersey has helped an astounding 18,000 individuals begin to build new lives through Fugitive Safe Surrender. This is exactly the sort of collaborative partnership that helps break the cycle of unlawful behavior and makes our communities safer.”

New Jersey State Parole Board Chairman James T. Plousis said, “The number of peaceful surrenders has exceeded our expectations and resulted in the third-largest Fugitive Safe Surrender event in the nation. Every single individual who took advantage of this program has made New Jersey safer. The former fugitives can finally walk in public without the fear that they will be stopped by law enforcement. This in turn frees up police resources that can better be used on other public safety matters.”

One success story from this Fugitive Safe Surrender event is that of Dessaix Maurisette, 25, a Jersey City resident who was wanted on multiple warrants for which he owed more than \$2,000 due to traffic violations. Mr. Maurisette said he had paid surcharges but struggled to pay the total amount owed in multiple municipalities.

Mr. Maurisette said, “I realized it’s time to plan for my future, and to stop being held back by expensive mistakes made when I was younger. I plan to get married and start a family someday. I realized I can no longer live with the fear that I might get pulled over and taken to jail while trying to drive my wife to deliver a baby, or driving to pick up diapers. Fugitive Safe Surrender gave me my future. I was able to resolve my matters with a single, \$100 payment, clear my warrants, and finally breathe as a free person.”

Another success story is that of Eddie Restrepo. Mr. Restrepo, 33, of West New York, lived in fear for years under the weight of multiple unpaid traffic tickets. But after he turned himself into the Fugitive Safe Surrender Program in Jersey City Wednesday morning, he walked away a free man with a clean record. Mr. Restrepo expected to pay thousands in fines but instead paid only a few hundred to resolve his warrants. After completing the Fugitive Safe Surrender program, he immediately decided to help out and has been volunteering at the program since Wednesday.

“This really saved my life,” Mr. Restrepo said. “It was a load off my back. I felt free.”

Fugitive Safe Surrender offered favorable consideration, not amnesty, to U.S. citizens and legal residents who were wanted on warrants for non-violent criminal or municipal matters.

The final results of the Fugitive Safe Surrender initiative held in Jersey City are as follows:

- A total of **4,587 individuals** surrendered at Fugitive Safe Surrender between Wednesday, November 6 and Saturday, November 9. They resolved an estimated total of approximately **10,000 non-violent warrants**.

This is the **highest turnout** of all five Fugitive Safe Surrender events held in New Jersey, and brings New Jersey's FSS total to **17,863 individuals** who surrendered. (A total of 2,245 surrendered at FSS-Camden in 2008, 4,103 at FSS-Newark in 2009, 3,901 at FSS-Somerset/New Brunswick in 2010, and 3,027 at FSS-Atlantic City in 2012).

This is the **third-highest turnout** of the 26 Fugitive Safe Surrender events held **nationwide**. In addition, New Jersey's five events rank **third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh** among those held nationwide. The first and second place still belong to Cleveland and Detroit, two of America's largest cities.

The economic impact:

A total of approximately **\$40,000** in municipal and superior court income was collected during the four-day event.

More will be collected as hundreds of overflow cases are heard this week. Still more will be collected on a scheduled basis from those assigned payment plans.

In addition, **each person** who surrenders represents an **estimated savings of \$500** to local governments. This **very conservative estimate** is based on the police and jail costs involved in processing someone wanted on a municipal traffic warrant.

Additional economic benefits follow when the former fugitives become eligible to apply for driver's license reinstatement, and the employment and other opportunities that come with having a state-issued identification and privilege to drive.

Still greater intangible benefits result when individuals are free to stop hiding from the law and to become contributing members of their families and society.

Other statistics:

Of the nearly 5,000 who surrendered, only **two** were taken into custody. This is because the vast majority of participants were wanted for **non-violent matters** and had **no violent criminal history**.

An estimated **63 percent** were wanted for **traffic warrants**.

An estimated **33 percent** were wanted for **misdemeanor criminal warrants**.

An estimated **4 percent** were wanted for **child support, family court, or probation warrants**.

A number estimated at **less than one percent** were wanted for **felony warrants**.

Fugitive Safe Surrender was made possible by a partnership led by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, New Jersey State Police, New Jersey State Parole Board, New Jersey Department of Corrections, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, New Jersey Office of Information Technology, and New Jersey Transit.

Key partners include the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice and the Police Institute at Rutgers-Newark; Evangelismos Greek Orthodox Church; the Prosecutor's and Sheriff's Offices of Hudson, Bergen, and Passaic counties; the Superior and Municipal Courts of New Jersey, primarily the Hudson and Passaic vicinages; the City of Jersey City and the County of Hudson; county and local law enforcement from Hudson, Bergen, and Passaic counties; and other agencies and organizations at the state, county, municipal, community and faith-based levels.

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