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District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program
Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026 Annual Report

Cases

- ***People v. Adam Michael Pirozzi*** **(SBSC No. 21CR04504)**

  The defendant was a licensed real estate broker who owned and operated AMPCore, Inc., a property management company doing business as Santa Barbara Property Management. In that capacity he received rent payments and security deposits belonging to more than 30 rental property owners, which were held in a client trust account.

  An investigation by the District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud (REF) Unit established that in December 2019 the defendant was entrusted with $150,000 by the agent of an elderly property owner for the purpose of funding repairs to that owner's rental property, and instead deposited those funds into his own personal account. When the agent inquired about the missing funds, the defendant attributed the discrepancy to an accounting error. In December 2020, the defendant transferred the remaining balance of his clients' trust funds, totaling $512,896.77, out of the trust account, and told a business partner that the accounts had been frozen because of a cyber-attack. The investigation further established that the defendant prepared false documentary evidence, laundered funds drawn from the client trust account, and embezzled an additional $531,539.35 from a corporate victim.

  The District Attorney's Office charged the defendant with seven felony counts, including fraudulent appropriation and embezzlement (Penal Code section 506), theft from an elder or dependent adult (Penal Code section 368(d)(1)), preparing false documentary evidence (Penal Code section 134), and money laundering (Penal Code section 186.10(a)(1)), together with special allegations of aggravated white collar crime involving a loss exceeding $500,000 under Penal Code section 186.11. The defendant pled guilty to two felony counts of embezzlement and admitted the aggravated white collar crime enhancement under Penal Code section 186.11(a)(1) and (2). He was placed on five years of formal probation, ordered to pay victim restitution in an amount to be determined, and made subject to a fine under Penal Code section 186.11(c). Approximately 35 victims were identified in the case.

  Using the asset preservation provisions of Penal Code section 186.11, the REF Unit located and froze the defendant's assets early in the prosecution and preserved them through the conclusion of the case. As a result, the District Attorney's Office secured approximately $1.8 million in frozen funds, which are being provided to the victims in this case.

- ***People v. Jamie Peace Kirdain*** **(SBSC No. 25CR10397)**

  The District Attorney's Office has charged the defendant by felony complaint with one count of procuring a false instrument for record in violation of Penal Code section 115(a), arising out of a Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) financing statement submitted for recording with the Santa Barbara County Clerk-Recorder's Office in December 2024 against a Santa Barbara County property owner. An arrest warrant has been issued, and the case is currently in warrant status.

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Because this is an open and pending matter in warrant status, the District Attorney's Office cannot discuss the specifics of the case beyond the charges set forth in the complaint.

- ***People v. Blanca Victoria Mendez Gomez***

  The District Attorney's Office has charged the defendant by felony complaint with 32 counts, consisting of one count of theft from an elder or dependent adult in violation of Penal Code section 368(d)(1), one count of grand theft in violation of Penal Code section 487(a), and 30 counts of forgery in violation of Penal Code section 470(d). The complaint further alleges an aggravated white collar crime enhancement under Penal Code section 186.11(a)(1) and (3). The charges arise out of an alleged mortgage-related scheme directed at an elderly Santa Barbara County homeowner. The defendant failed to appear as ordered, an arrest warrant has been issued, and the case is currently in warrant status.

  Because this is an open and pending matter in warrant status, the District Attorney's Office cannot discuss the specifics of the case beyond the charges set forth in the complaint.

- ***People v. Inna Vladimirovna Cook* (SBSC No. 25CR00960)**

  Although this is a pending case, the facts set forth below have been discussed in open court and detailed in filed documents, and so they can be summarized here, although they remain allegations only. The case arose from a series of referrals to the Santa Barbara Police Department and to Santa Barbara County Adult Protective Services concerning an elderly Santa Barbara woman, then in her eighties, who lived in a condominium on Calle de los Amigos. Between April 2023 and August 2024, law enforcement responded approximately 13 times to check the victim's welfare. Neighbors, friends, family members, the victim's gardener, and bank employees independently reported that the defendant, a neighbor, had befriended the victim, taken control of her finances, and progressively isolated her from everyone around her. Handwritten notes were posted on the victim's window asking that she be left alone; the victim's sister, who had not spoken with her in over a year, did not believe the handwriting was her sister's.

  A review of financial records obtained by search warrant showed that the victim began writing checks to the defendant in 2022 and wrote her more than $92,000 in checks during 2023 alone. In January 2024, the defendant was added to the victim's checking account as a joint owner and authorized user. The victim then liquidated her retirement and investment accounts into that joint account, which grew to approximately $1.5 million. In February 2024, approximately $1,099,000 of those funds was used to purchase a condominium on Miradero Drive in Santa Barbara, but title to the property was taken in the defendant's name alone. Separately, in April 2024 the defendant recorded a quitclaim deed with the Santa Barbara County Clerk-Recorder purporting to transfer the victim's Calle de los Amigos condominium, valued at approximately $1.2 million, from the victim's trust to the defendant.

  As the number of neighbors, family members, social workers, and law enforcement officers attempting to check on the victim at the Calle de los Amigos property continued to increase, the defendant moved the victim out of that residence and into the newly purchased Miradero Drive condominium and held her there. The victim was locked inside the residence and was instructed not to come to the door if anyone knocked. When investigators subsequently entered the Miradero Drive residence, they observed that its doors were deadbolted on both sides, making it possible to lock a person inside the home. Neighbors at the Miradero Drive complex reported that in the year the defendant and the victim had lived there, they had never seen the victim come outside. This conduct is the basis of kidnapping and false imprisonment charges.

The complaint further charges elder or dependent adult abuse under circumstances likely to produce great bodily harm or death, theft from an elder or dependent adult, two counts of procuring a false instrument for record, perjury by declaration, two counts of receiving stolen property; 10 counts of money laundering; conspiracy to conceal evidence; and concealing evidence. The complaint also alleges an aggravated white collar crime enhancement under Penal Code section 186.11(a)(1) and (2).

Pursuant to Penal Code section 186.11, the District Attorney's Office moved early in this case to secure the defendant's property for the payment of potential restitution. Additionally, title to the Miradero Drive condominium purchased with the victim's stolen funds has already been transferred to the victim, and the victim's family has since sold that property to recoup the money that was taken to purchase it. Title to the Calle de los Amigos property has also been transferred back to the victim. This matter remains pending.

- ***People v. Byron Richard Tarnutzer and Vonna Tarnutzer* (SBSC Nos. 26CR01361 and 26CR05236)**

The District Attorney's Office is prosecuting two related felony cases against these defendants. Both remain pending; however, because substantial information regarding the allegations has been presented and discussed in open court, the general nature of the charges is summarized below, although they remain allegations only.

The first case (SBSC No. 26CR01361), filed in March 2026, charges the defendants in a 68-count felony complaint. The complaint alleges a fraudulent securities scheme, conspiracy, grand theft, money laundering, forgery, perjury by declaration, contracting without a license, failure to secure workers' compensation insurance, and tax offenses, arising out of the solicitation of approximately $1,750,000 from a victim shortly after she received a divorce settlement, together with additional funds obtained from other lenders and investors. Of particular note, the complaint charges multiple counts of mortgage fraud in violation of Penal Code section 532f. It is alleged that the defendants routed the victim's investment funds and construction payments through a business account and then used the resulting deposits as false proof of business income in support of mortgage applications, including the submission of materially false profit and loss statements and a materially false letter from an accountant to a mortgage lender. The mortgage fraud counts carry a special allegation that the value of the property taken, damaged, or destroyed exceeded $3,000,000 under Penal Code section 12022.6(a)(4). The complaint further alleges an aggravated white collar crime enhancement under Penal Code section 186.11(a)(1) and (2).

The second case (SBSC No. 26CR05236), filed in July 2026, charges the defendants in a 17-count felony complaint arising out of allegations of theft of the defendant's elderly mother's home from her trust. The complaint charges theft from an elder or dependent adult (Penal Code section 368(d)(1)), embezzlement by a trustee (Penal Code section 506), conspiracy, forgery, mortgage fraud (Penal Code section 532f(a)(1)), and recording false documents (Penal Code section 115(a)).

In these cases, pursuant to Penal Code section 186.11 the District Attorney's Office has secured approximately $1.2 million in liquid funds from defendants' personal bank accounts, as well as two residences owned by the defendants in Santa Barbara and in Newport Beach. Most recently, the District Attorney's Office petitioned the court for the appointment of a receiver, and the court granted that petition. The receiver has been appointed to marshal the assets and to ensure that the equity in the residences does not dissipate during the pendency of the cases. Both matters remain pending.

Statistics

District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program					
	FY 2021-2022	**FY 2022-2023**	**FY 2023-2024**	**FY 2024-2025**	**FY 2025-2026**
Referrals	28	12	23	20	27
Investigations	14	10	23	20	27
Cases Filed	3	2	4	2	3
Convictions	0	1	2	0	1

Highlights

- The District Attorney's REF Unit continued to make aggressive use of the asset preservation provisions of Penal Code section 186.11 to protect victim restitution. During Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the Unit secured approximately $1.8 million in frozen funds that are being provided to the victims in the Pirozzi case; obtained the transfer of title to a residence purchased with stolen funds directly to the victim in the Cook case, allowing the victim's family to sell the property and recoup the stolen money; and secured approximately $1.2 million in liquid funds together with two residences in the Tarnutzer cases, in which the court has now appointed a receiver at the People's request to marshal the assets and preserve the equity in those residences.

- The REF Unit continued to work closely with the County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor's Office during Fiscal Year 2025-2026. That coordination continues to identify allegedly fraudulent filings.

- The REF Unit continues to prioritize cases involving elderly and dependent adult victims, and to coordinate closely with the Santa Barbara Police Department, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, County Adult Protective Services, and the United States Postal Inspection Service.

- The REF Unit continues to engage in outreach and training with local agencies, community organizations, and the public on real estate fraud and financial elder abuse issues, including presentations to community groups and appearances on local media outlets.

Outreach and Training

During Fiscal Year 2025-2026, investigators assigned to the District Attorney's REF Unit participated in the following outreach, training, and public education events:

- July 2025 – Attended the California Department of Justice, Bureau of Forensic Services training.

- July 31, 2025 – Attended the Federal Trade Commission seminar on financial elder abuse.

- August 2025 – Participated in the Scam Squad program and delivered a televised presentation on mortgage fraud on KEYT.

- September 4 and September 23, 2025 – Completed National White Collar Crime Center webinar training on financial elder abuse.

- October 15, 2025 – Participated in the Senior Expo alongside the District Attorney's Victim-Witness Assistance Program.
- January 15, 2026 – Completed Federal Bureau of Investigation Open Source Intelligence for Law Enforcement training.
- June 2, 2026 – Delivered a fraud and elder abuse presentation to the Jewish Federation.