



SAO UPDATE

SUMMER 2026

The Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office • State's Attorney, Ivan J. Bates

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STATE'S ATTORNEY REACTS TO PASSAGE OF P.A.C.E. ACT



This legislative session, the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office advocated for the passage of the Protecting Artists' Creative Expression Act, also known as the P.A.C.E. Act, which limits how rap and song lyrics or creative expression can be used in court proceedings.

"I am grateful for the strong support shown in Annapolis during this legislative session for the P.A.C.E. Act. I want to thank my friend Kevin Liles, who brought me into the fold on this important piece of legislation, as well as the bill sponsors, Delegate Marlon Amprey and Senator Charles Sydnor, who both recognized its importance and worked diligently to move it forward," said **State's Attorney Ivan J. Bates**.

"For too long, creative expression, particularly in rap music, has been misunderstood and misused in courtrooms as evidence of guilt, rather than what it truly is: art. Artistic expression should not be taken literally or stripped of its cultural context to influence a jury unfairly. The PACE Act helps ensure that individuals are judged based on credible evidence, not creative works that are often fictional, exaggerated, or symbolic.

"This legislation strikes the right balance. It protects against the improper use of creative expression in criminal proceedings while still allowing courts, in juvenile cases, to consider such expression when evaluating a young person's need for mental health services or diversion programs. That distinction is both thoughtful and necessary.

"Public safety and fairness in our justice system must go hand in hand. The PACE Act reinforces the principle that our courts should be guided by facts and law, not misinterpretations of art. I appreciate the partnership of lawmakers who understand that protecting constitutional rights strengthens the integrity of our entire justice system."

Maryland is the first East Coast state to pass this type of legislation.

Sentencing Recap: A Snapshot of Recent Defendants Held Accountable



Defendant Antonio Grant was sentenced to 80 years of incarceration, with the first 15 years ineligible for parole, for two counts of First-Degree Assault, one count of Use of a Firearm in the Commission of a Crime of Violence, and two counts of Firearm Possession by a Prohibited Person.

The Defendant fired seven shots at two people riding bikes through the Carol Fuel gas station parking lot in the Princess Plaza Shopping Center on Edmondson Avenue in May of 2025.



Defendant LaForrest Morgan was sentenced to 70 years of incarceration, the first 25 years without the possibility of parole, for the non-fatal shooting of a 29-year-old man at a Chinese Carryout restaurant in the Penn North Neighborhood.

The Defendant was convicted of Attempted Second-Degree Murder, Use of a Firearm in the Commission of a Crime of Violence, Possession of a Firearm with a Disqualifying Conviction, Wear/Carry/Transport of a Handgun, Ammunition, and Discharging.

He had previously been convicted of Manslaughter in 2002.

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SENTENCING RECAP: A SNAPSHOT OF RECENT DEFENDANTS HELD ACCOUNTABLE



Defendant Quontay Spinks was given a Life sentence for First-Degree Murder, Use of a Firearm in the Commission of a Crime of Violence, First-Degree Assault, Attempted Robbery with a Deadly Weapon, and First-Degree Attempted Murder.

The Defendant fatally shot 36-year-old Antonio Peoples in September 2024 at the 700 block of Aliceanna Street and non-fatally shot Mr. Peoples' girlfriend. This sentence also covered several other cases the Defendant pleaded to, for offenses that occurred both before and after this homicide.

Defendants Charles Robinson and Korey Hopson were each sentenced to Life plus 30 years for the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Denzel Johnson and the non-fatal shooting of a 15-year-old male on May 25, 2024, at the 900 block of N. Dukeland Street.

Both Defendants were found guilty by a Baltimore City Jury in September 2025 of Conspiracy to Murder Resulting in Death, Second-Degree Murder, First-Degree Assault, Possession of a Regulated Firearm, and Wear, Carry, Transport of a Handgun in a Vehicle.

SAO GRIEVES LOSS OF NON-PROFIT LEADER & PARTNER



The Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City mourns the loss of our valued partner and steadfast supporter, Natasha Guynes. A tireless advocate for survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, Natasha dedicated her life to uplifting those who had experienced profound trauma and adversity.

As the founder of HER Resiliency Center, Natasha poured her heart and soul into creating a safe haven for victims of crime.

Through her leadership, countless individuals received the support, resources, and motivation needed to break free from exploitation and begin rebuilding their lives. Many who crossed her path came to recognize their own victimization through the compassion and guidance she and her team provided.

Natasha's impact on our community is immeasurable. Her advocacy transformed lives, inspired hope, and advanced the fight for justice on behalf of society's most vulnerable. Her legacy will endure through the many lives she touched, and her absence will be deeply felt by all who had the privilege of knowing and working alongside her.



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APRIL SEES LOWEST HOMICIDE TOTAL SINCE 1970



Four individuals lost their lives due to homicide in April of 2026, marking the lowest monthly total murder rate in Baltimore City since at least 1970. **State's Attorney Ivan J. Bates** reflected on this new record and the work that still lies ahead:

"A record low in homicides for the month of April marks meaningful progress in our city's ongoing efforts to reduce violence. However, the heartbreaking reality is that four lives lost equate to four families forever changed by the sudden and tragic death of their loved ones. Behind each number is a person, a family, and a community grappling with the weight of that trauma and loss," said **State's Attorney Bates**.

"Our goal as a city must always be to preserve life. Achieving this requires sustained collaboration between community members, government officials, and law enforcement, grounded in trust, accountability, and shared responsibility. This progress did not happen by chance; it is the result of intentional coordination among our office, the Baltimore Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Mayor's Office, the Sheriff's Office, our partners in surrounding jurisdictions, and our federal and state law enforcement colleagues—all working together to prevent violence and hold offenders accountable at every level."

"This record low is an achievement that belongs to every engaged Baltimorean who shows up for their community. It is a sign of what is possible when we work together with purpose. But it is not the finish line. We remain committed to building on this progress and continuing the work to ensure that every person in Baltimore can live safely, and every family can grow without fear."



State's Attorney's Office Highlights Victim Witness Staff for NCVRW

During the week of April 19, the State's Attorney's Office commemorated National Crime Victims' Rights Week by releasing a series of interviews with our Victim Witness staff discussing why they are passionate about supporting and uplifting victims.

From discussing the resources they offer to sharing their own personal experiences as survivors of crime, this video series gave viewers an inside look at the State's Attorney's Victim Witness team and their devotion to this important work. To watch the video series, visit the State's Attorney's Office social media channels on Instagram, Facebook, or X under the handle @BaltimoreSAO.

If you are a victim or witness in an active Baltimore City criminal case and need assistance, contact 410-396-1897 or victimwitness@statattorney.org. If you are a family member of a victim of a Baltimore City homicide and need grief counseling services, contact our Family Bereavement Center at 443-984-6244 or FBC@statattorney.org.



Back To School Backpack Giveaway & Community Cookout

The Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office Back To School Backpack Giveaway and Community Cookout will be held on August 15, 2026 from 12:00pm- 4:00pm at Sinclair Elementary School located at 3880 Sinclair Lane, Baltimore, MD 21213.



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OUT & ABOUT WITH THE SAO

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Victim Witness Coordinators Caleigh Larkin and Vonda Goode attended the Statewide Memorial Service for Victims of Crime and their families on Sunday, April 19.



Community Engagement Team Members Natasha Zepeda, Joe Richards, Bruce Brown, and Matias Cacheiro spoke with students at Harford Heights Elementary School for career day.



State's Attorney Bates spoke at the ceremonial street naming for Al Wylie and presented him with a citation for his decades of service to the community and in celebration of his 80th birthday.



Victim Witness Chief Amanda Grantham and Coordinators Evelin Guzman and Carly Evans delivered canned food donated by staff at the State's Attorney's Office to the House of Ruth.



State's Attorney Bates spoke with Ms. Lannigan's 5th-grade students at Federal Hill Prep Elementary School.



Community Liaison Bruce Brown and Deputy Chief of External Affairs Dr. Joel Bratton attended Career Day at Hampden Elementary/ Middle School.



ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY FOR BALTIMORE CITY:

The mission of the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City is to create true public safety through partnerships with elected officials, law enforcement, and our residents. The Office fulfills this goal through the successful prosecution of all crimes in Baltimore City.

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