

Regulatory Oversight Podcast — The Garden State's AG Blueprint: Data, Partnership, Accountability**Host: Stephen Piepgrass****Guests: Chris Carlson, Lyndsay Ruotolo****Aired: November 6, 2025****Stephen Piepgrass (00:04):**

Welcome to another episode of *Regulatory Oversight*, a podcast dedicated to delivering expert analysis on the latest development shaping the regulatory landscape. I'm one of the hosts of our podcast, Stephen Peep Grass. I lead our firm's regulatory investigation, strategy and enforcement, or RISE practice group. Our podcast provides insights from members of our practice group, including our nationally ranked state attorney's general team, as well as guest commentary from industry leaders, regulatory specialists. And like in today's podcast, government officials. Our team is committed to bringing you valuable perspectives, in depth analysis and practical advice from some of the foremost authorities and practitioners in the regulatory field today. Before we begin, I encourage all our listeners to visit and subscribe to our blog at [RegulatoryOversight.com](https://www.regulatoryoversight.com), which should help you stay current on the latest and regulatory news. Today I'm joined by my colleague Chris Carlson and New Jersey first Assistant Attorney General Lyndsay Ruotolo, to discuss her past legal experiences and how they shape her decision-making and various priorities.

Today we'll also discuss some of the unique aspects of the New Jersey Attorney General's office, including its civil enforcement authority and how the OAG collaborates with other state agencies. Chris is a partner in the Rise Practice Group and a member of our state attorney's general team. He advises clients on a wide variety of state, federal, and local regulatory matters, including investigations and enforcement actions. With a background as a former assistant Attorney General, Chris is particularly experienced with state and federal consumer protection laws related to the pharmaceutical and health sciences industry, consumer financial services and advertising and marketing among others. Lyndsay first joined the New Jersey AG's office as the director of the Division of Criminal Justice in 2021 before taking on her current role as first Assistant AG in 2022. Before joining the AG's office, Lyndsay served as acting Union County prosecutor, where she launched the intelligence driven prosecution unit to combat violent crime. She's also previously served as an assistant US attorney in the US Attorney's Office for the district of New Jersey where she worked in the area of violent crime prosecution and before that served as an assistant prosecutor in Union County. Lyndsay and Chris, thank you for joining me and our listeners today. We're really excited to hear from you and particularly to learn about all that's going on in the New Jersey Attorney General's office.

Lyndsay Ruotolo (02:26):

Thank you so much, so appreciate being here in the opportunity with both of you. Thank you.

Chris Carlson (02:30):

Yeah, Lyndsay, we're absolutely thrilled that you're here. Let's get the party started here. Your life didn't start when I met you about what, 10 months ago. Tell me about your background, what drives your decision making and really what drives the thinking in terms of being the first assistant? Give us some background here.

Lyndsay Ruotolo (02:49):

Thanks so much. Stephen mentioned I have background in public service that primarily up until this point had been in the prosecution area of serving at all levels except for municipal in the state of New Jersey, and that's really what has informed my public service career. But I went into public service because I was the daughter of two public servants, so I think it may be in the DNA too, but it's been an absolute honor and a privilege to serve the community that raised me to be able to give back to the community in New Jersey and to do it in a way where my whole mission every day has been to promote safety, public safety, and now with this current role and having the opportunity to serve Attorney General CL and as this first assistant and work with this amazing team that we've had in the leadership team that I've been lucky enough to be a part of these last several years, public safety has taken on a more expansive definition for me. It's no longer just the traditional way of thinking about it as a prosecutor, but the way that you've thought about it and you're wearing the hats you've worn in your previous career, it's about consumer protection. It's about all different aspects of life as a resident of the state of New Jersey and what we can be doing to make sure that people can go about their daily lives safely. And that has really been in such an interesting expansion of that initial role.

Chris Carlson (04:14):

Yeah. I really want to dive into your focus on public safety and your commitment there both personally in the office. What makes the New Jersey Attorney General's office different with one caveat, I really don't want to hear about how crazy your state is in my state is right now in these off-year election cycles. What makes New Jersey unique?

Lyndsay Ruotolo (04:33):

Well, it is an off-cycle election here in New Jersey. That's for the governor. The Attorney general in New Jersey is appointed, but the term runs with the governor. So that's one sort of unique aspect of it. But really what makes the New Jersey Attorney General so unique is the breadth of his authority, the breadth of authority of this office. Were an 8,000-employee department, the Department of Law and Public Safety, it's 8,000 employees and within that there are 24 divisions and offices that do everything from the traditional things that you think about with an Attorney general that has criminal enforcement authority such as ours. It's the Division of Criminal Justice, the division of the New Jersey State Police, the division of the Office of Insurance for our prosecutors, all the traditional law enforcement folks. But then it's also, we regulate horse racing. We regulate the casino industry. We regulate consumer affairs.

So it is on any given day, what's on our desk is going to be quite different from what would've been on my desk as a career prosecutor. The other really unique aspect about the attorney general in New Jersey is his law enforcement authority. He is the chief law enforcement officer,

but within that, he has the ability with the stroke of a pen to create a directive that has the force of law for all of our 42,000 sworn law enforcement officers, our 21 county prosecutor offices, which is like the equivalent of a district attorney in most other states. So we're able to have this unified criminal justice approach where we're all sort of following the same policies and protocols and he can really set sort of policy initiatives. And we work closely with our law enforcement partners before he does something like that and with other stakeholder groups, but we've been able to impact some hopefully lasting and meaningful change through the generalist directive authority.

Chris Carlson (06:29):

You mentioned some of the initiatives that you've been involved in. What's the initiative you're most proud of?

Lyndsay Ruotolo (06:35):

That's a really hard question. I've been so lucky to be part of this team for three and a half years, and I'm proud of something that they do on a daily basis, but I'd love to talk about our work in gun violence reduction. And then there are maybe three that stand out in my head, one that we just did last week, which was on the topic of law enforcement directives. The AG issued one, actually that was this week, this was Monday. The AG issued a directive that we had been working on with our law enforcement partners for a very long time to get this one out. And it is a directive that sets sort of baseline requirements for all law enforcement agencies in the state to have a policy for how they're going to respond to an active violent event. So an active shooter event.

And we've seen these play out all over the country. And this directive sets a core principle for all first responders that the key goal is obviously the preservation of life and the reduction of harm to victims. And then we also set guidelines for what each individual policy should have in place. And within that, there's going to be mandatory statewide training for all law enforcement to be trained in active shooter responses. There's going to be required collaboration with educational institutions at every level, but we localized it. We know that we can set these standards at a statewide level, but New Jersey is really a very diverse state. We've got the shore, we've got these rural areas. I mean, we're called the garden State. I'm looking out at the Newark skyline right now, so I'm not seeing the gardens, but drive 30 minutes and you're at a horse farm.

So there is really, it's not a one size fits all for anything we do in this state. And so we keep that in mind when the general issues, a directive like this where we give guidelines and protocols and things that we want to see in every directive, but we leave it up to the locals to make sure that what they're doing makes sense given their community and the resources that they have available to them. The other two things that I'm really, really proud of is the work that we've done in combating sexual violence. And I know we'll talk about human trafficking as a component of that, but both the general and I really, the general made it a priority at the beginning of his administration to really change the way our office and law enforcement generally addresses sexual violence. And I'm proud of the steps we've taken.

We've created Breathe teams, which are multidisciplinary response teams that respond to non-fatal strangulation. We find that that's one of the biggest indicators of future intimate partner

violence, intimate partner homicide, and also has a correlation with violence towards law enforcement officers. So with these teams, we're going out immediately, we're preserving evidence, we're having victim centric focused interviews. We've also completely transformed the way safe kits or sexual assault forensic exam kits are collected, tested. It's mandatory testing. If a victim consents to testing, it will get tested. There's no discretion about that. And now as of this year, we've released an online tracking so it's all public and the victims are able to go in and check at a time that works for them so that we're not re-triggering them, re-traumatizing them to go track sort of the status of their case and how it's moving forward and in a private setting online.

And so, I'm really thrilled with the work we've done in that area. And then, well, one that I think will have the most lasting impact is our Arrive Together program, which arrive we're really big on acronyms, is it stands for alternative responses to reduce instances of violence and escalation. And it started as a pilot program in a rural community down in South Jersey where we partnered a mental health professional and a plain clothes officer in a car, and they responded to mental health crisis calls. They literally arrived together, and the results were incredible. So when AG Platkin came in, we expanded it to two municipal departments in my old county Union County. And then we are now in all 21 counties. We're servicing over 75% of the population, which is 9.5 million people in New Jersey. So it's a lot of people getting this service. We're seeing a dramatic reduction of escalation, no injuries, no arrests, and again, it's not a one size fits all.

We have different models based on the needs of each individual community that we serve, but it's been a game changer in New Jersey and just something that we created with the idea that we could share our roadmap with other communities who want to create the same program or a program that works for them. But it really has been a response to mental health that is a whole of community response. And it of course has the benefits for law enforcement and public safety, but we're also getting mental health care to the folks who actually need it when they need it, instead of just having them sit in emergency rooms and never getting the help they need it. So it's been a really beautiful thing to watch grow over the last couple of years.

Chris Carlson (11:56):

Well, let me dig a little bit into ride because I can hear the passion in your voice. You, everyone, the AG's office have limited resources and you only have 24 hours in a day and you have to sleep somewhere. Tell me just how your office size to drive on an initiative like that, why is Arrive worth the limited resources and how do you sustain that commitment?

Lyndsay Ruotolo (12:21):

That's a great question or question. So Arrive in particular was born out of the folks who, so in New Jersey, lemme back up. In New Jersey, there is a statute that requires the Attorney General's office to investigate every fatal police encounter. So whether it's a suicide in the presence of law enforcement to an officer involved shooting to a death in custody, the AG's office is responsible for investigating those and we are required to present them to a grand jury to make the decision about whether or not to criminally charge. In doing that, the people who do that work are in a really tough situation where they're watching. We also have required body-worn cameras, all law enforcement in New Jersey where body-worn cameras. So all of these

are caught on video for the most part. And the folks doing this work are day in and day out bearing witness to the last moments of someone's life.

And most of these are not criminal culpability, but they're still tragic. And what we kept seeing over and over was the fact that law enforcement are responding to incidents that are clear mental health crises, and we wanted to do everything we could to put law enforcement in a position that wouldn't have tragic results that could deescalate. So we improved de-escalation training for law enforcement across the state, but we also felt like we needed to do more to hit the root cause of why they're the ones responding to these calls in the first place. And so we created the pilot program because we weren't really sure how this was going to work. And as you might imagine, there's always a little bit of hesitancy when you do something really different. And this was really different, but the moment we got it off the ground, every hesitancy on both sides, the mental health professionals and the law enforcement folks was gone.

They were partners. They did not view each other as the other anymore. It was the social worker or the mental health professional and the officer as partners. And it also changed the culture of the whole department that worked with those folks. Even if they weren't on an arrived team, they would see the interaction, they would've access to a mental health professional, they would be able to learn the de-escalation techniques from the partner, from the colleague who was on the team. And we saw the drop of use of force in the whole agency when we started seeing this grow and when we moved it to municipal police department as opposed to the state police, it changed a little, but it also gave it validity to grow with other municipal departments. And so really we're now at a position where municipal departments are calling us to say, we want to get this.

How do we get this moving in our community? And we've been very blessed with support from both the governor's office and our legislature who is one of the first times we saw money in the budget that we didn't ask for or we asked for X amount and got more. And that money is used for the mental health resources. Law enforcement are actually seeing a savings in their budget because they're spending less time on overtime before arrive. Law enforcement would've to bring this person to an emergency room and sit with them the entire time they were there. That's a lot of overtime and that's a lot of time where officers who could be doing other public safety initiatives are off the road. And here we're able to avoid the emergency room in many instances and instead do appropriate care for the actual needs of the individual in the moment and as follow up. And we're seeing families really changed by this program. So we can't really factor in how much money we're saving, but I think the value is seen in the results and I think there's no price that you could put on improving the lives of a family and an individual, but we're also seeing the price of insurance for these municipalities might be going down if they have less use of force instances. So there's a real cost benefit to making this kind of investment in a program like this

Chris Carlson (16:28):

If you can't actualize the numbers. I think the fact that the legislature gave you more than you asked, I don't think I've had that commentary in any of my discussions with people in state AG's offices. So I think the proofs in the pudding there. You referenced the importance of partnerships. So many of our clients are in the AG space, not only because they want to be reactive to a consumer protection issue, but they really want to partner with the roles of AGs

knowing that they really have punched above their weight. Talk about from the criminal side, where are the benefits of partners? How does the business community engage well on that side of the house?

Lyndsay Ruotolo (17:08):

Yeah, I mean, we really couldn't get any of our initiatives off the ground if it weren't for the partnerships. And on the law enforcement side, it's like a couple key groups. We have the obvious ones, our law enforcement agencies that we work with from local level, state level, county level, even federal level. We work very collaboratively with them. And I think an area where we've seen remarkable partnership arrive being one of them, but another one on the criminal side is our reduction of gun violence. That was another key priority for this attorney general when he came into office and general plaque and very publicly made that an initiative. And we've successfully been able to drive down gun violence. And it wasn't sort of like a one size fits all solution to that problem. It was these are real numbers for the rejection of gun violence.

We saw in 2023 was the first time we saw the number of shooting victims drop below a thousand in the history of our tracking, which has been more than like 15 years. In 2024, that number dropped even lower to 778 victims. That's a 16% drop from 2023, which had been the historic low up until that point. And this year we're not done yet, but we're on track to be even less. And of course, one shooting is too many. We're not saying mission accomplished until we have no shootings in the state of New Jersey, but those numbers are lives that have been saved. Those are people going celebrating birthdays, people celebrating holidays, people at the dinner table tonight that wouldn't have been had. We not sort of taken the steps that we've taken. And one component was working with our law enforcement partners. We created the Attorney General's Gun Violence Reduction task force, which was led by intelligence rather than just reactionary law enforcement initiatives.

And it actually collaborated really closely with prosecutors to identify the folks who are actually driving the violence and focus our resources, our limited resources on those cases so that we could drive down the violence by focusing on pretrial detention for those unique individuals that pose the greatest harm. So we had that law enforcement partnership bucket, but then we also had the community partnership bucket, and that was working with the legislature and businesses to get investments in community-based violence intervention programs like grassroots folks who have been on the ground doing this work for 20 years. They just didn't have a word or a name for it. And we've elevated it by funding it, and we've elevated it by recognizing it and calling it by what it is, which is a partner in our public safety strategy. And the AG convened, a multidisciplinary working group of CBVI professionals and law enforcement professionals to come together and established rules of the road so that they could work in parallel because their mission's the same, but their role is so different.

But having these folks on the ground in the community to prevent the violence before it starts is a really key component of why we've been able to drive the violence down. And it's not just community-based organizations, it's violence prevention and seeing the healthcare industry in New Jersey, which is a pretty significant industry in our state, be so invested and so engaged in this process has been a remarkable part of why we've been able to drive down violence in this state over the last couple of years. We saw as the investment in these programs rose, the

numbers started to drop. So there's criminal and hospital-based support for it. And then there are the civil enforcement actions. The general created our safe statewide affirmative Firearm Enforcement office, which was the first in the country, which really focused on accountability within the industry. And some of that has come through collaboration and some of that has come through enforcement.

But the fact that we're having conversations with industry professionals about firearm safety is a pretty key aspect of driving it down. And then there's also data. We're really big data nerds here in New Jersey and we have an Office of Justice data and rather than just collect the data and not know what to do with it, we are really transparent about it and we put a lot of it online, including everything from where we're seeing increases in carry permit registrations and licensing to where we're seeing the most gun violence, to where we're seeing the most community-based violence intervention investment and where we're not as importantly, where we're not. So that private industry could take the initiative to help fund these sort of grassroots organizations that are coming up in communities or need to come up in communities where we're seeing increase in violence or a presence of gun violence, but we're not seeing grassroots folks on the ground there. So that's another area where partnerships with industry could really make a difference.

Chris Carlson (22:16):

You mentioned safe, you mentioned other state agencies. Talk me through from the business community often you're like, where do I even start? I have all of this behemoth of a state and multiple states that regulate me. Where am I engaging? Who should I be listening to? Why does New Jersey need another agency? Just talk me through bureaucracy if I'm a company.

Lyndsay Ruotolo (22:42):

Sure. Well, in New Jersey, I recommend they start with us, but that's in my own bias. But I say that kiddingly, but I do somewhere in our department, we represent all of the other state agencies. So if they're not sure where to start, we make a pretty good first engagement. And we're also pretty active in our communities, not just at the ground level, but also with businesses and industry. We do a lot of outreach. We do a lot of public appearances where industry is invited. And I hope, I like to think we're a pretty accessible team. So for folks doing work here in New Jersey, anyone within the AG's office, if we're not the right person, there's sort of like a no wrong door policy here. You might get me and I might not be the right person to talk to, but I'm going to know who it is and we're going to connect you with the right folks. And if it's outside of our department, chances are someone in our division of law represents that sister agency and we'll know exactly the right point of contact. So we've tried to make ourselves more accessible because we find open and available lines of communication lead to really unexpected and really productive partnerships.

Chris Carlson (23:54):

We could talk about the Garden state forever. Talk to me about more about horizontal partnerships between state AGs and what is the level of communication between states? And just talk to me about what your learnings in New Jersey or some other state's learnings really benefit one another.

Lyndsay Ruotolo (24:15):

Yeah, so it's so interesting. Before I was first assistant, my collaboration as a prosecutor and someone in law enforcement was always the neighboring states. We always had relationships with Pennsylvania and New York because nobody just stays in one state to do whatever misdeeds they're going to do. They crossed lines and were part of the northeast corridor of all the good things that are transported along that quarter and all the bad things. But now as first assistant, I've been exposed gratefully so to this AG world, and I'm sort of amazed by the work that we can do when we collaborate across offices. And that is a very robust open communication between, certainly we have a lot of communication in this northeast region with everyone from Delaware and DC all the way up through Maine. And all of our offices actually physically get together, members of our office, physically get together for meetings on various topics, everything from child exploitation to consumer protection.

And we find that regardless of party, there's so much common ground when it comes to public safety that we can work collaboratively on initiatives and we get a lot more done when we work together. And it's been probably one of my favorite aspects of this role within the AG's office is just to be able to work with colleagues from across the country, across party lines. I think it's one of the last areas in government at the moment where you truly see, you don't truly don't see party, and you see mission. And I think that's sort of the best of government and public service is when it is mission-driven and have tremendous respect for colleagues across this country who are just doing incredible workday in and day out to protect the people they serve.

Chris Carlson (26:15):

Yeah, I know, I'm grateful. I know just at the collaboration, I just would never have dreamed when you're in West Virginia that you would find a bedfellow in California about something, but you're able to make a difference because you are in that level of communication. Well, Lyndsay, I'm just thrilled that you made time for this. This has just been such a pleasure, and I'll let Stephen wrap us up.

Lyndsay Ruotolo (26:39):

Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Stephen Piepgrass (26:42):

Great. Yes, really loved hosting you, Lyndsay and Chris, and being able to hear this conversation. I know our listeners will really enjoy it as well. Loved hearing all of the work you're doing in the public safety space, and I know that the members of the business community that listen to this are going to be very interested to hear about ways they can partner together with New Jersey. I also really enjoyed hearing about the breadth of the AG's office and the fact that you really are a one-stop shop when companies and folks like us have questions about regulatory issues. You're really the first stop when it comes to dealing with New Jersey and thinking through how to be good corporate citizens. So thank you and thank you to our listeners for tuning in as well. Please remember to subscribe using Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Stitcher, or whatever medium you choose, and we look forward to having you join us again next time.

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