FDLE Coordinates Statewide Drug Task Force. On March 28, 2011, Governor Rick Scott and Attorney General Pam Bondi announced a statewide law enforcement response plan to confront criminal drug trafficking in Florida, including, but not limited to, the criminal distribution of prescription drugs. This included creation of a Statewide Drug Strike Force to assist local law enforcement agencies by providing intelligence, analytical and investigative support. Commissioner Bailey serves as the statewide coordinator of the strike force and regional teams are co-led by Florida’s sheriffs and police chiefs. The plan allocated grant funds to provide support for the strike forces throughout the state.

On July 1, 2011, the State Surgeon General issued a statewide public health emergency declaration in response to the ongoing problem of prescription drug abuse and diversion in Florida. It required dispensing practitioners no longer authorized to dispense controlled substances in listed in Schedule II and Schedule III of Section 893.03, Florida Statutes, to dispose of any inventory and cooperate fully with the Department of Health (DOH) and Florida’s regional teams. On July 5, 2011, compliance inspections resulted in the confiscation of 105,000 pills at 24 locations during a statewide operation to ensure compliance with Florida’s new prescription drug law. Through September 30, 2011, the Strike Force has made more than 1,200 arrests, including 20 doctors, and seized almost 280,000 pharmaceutical pills, 45 vehicles, over 50 weapons and $2.3 million.

Record-Setting Month for Florida’s DNA Database. In November 2010, the Department announced its Combined DNA Indexing System, or DNA Database, documented the highest number of hits to unsolved crimes, 379, in a single month since its inception in 1989. The Database contains more than 700,000 samples and receives an average of 7,000 new samples each month. These samples undergo analysis and are entered into the database where they are compared against DNA evidence found at a crime scene. Hits are generated when a DNA sample left at a crime scene matches to a known offender’s DNA in the database or when two crime scene samples in the database match one another – indicating the same offender may have been present at both scenes. Florida’s system is comprised of FDLE’s six regional DNA crime laboratories as well as Florida’s five locally-run crime laboratories. It interfaces with the FBI’s database, enabling comparisons of DNA profiles between state databases.

Florida law requires offenders convicted of a felony and certain misdemeanors to submit a DNA sample. The law further requires DNA analysis to be performed on each sample and the results of these analyses to be stored for comparison of DNA from unresolved cases in an attempt to identify the perpetrator. In 2009, the Legislature expanded the law, contingent upon funding, to authorize the collection of DNA samples from individuals arrested for any felony offense, specified misdemeanor offense or an offense committed to benefit a criminal gang. On July 1, 2011, FDLE began collecting arrestee samples from offenders for murder, assault/battery and sex crimes. Additional offenses will be phased-in over a 10-year period.
Three Arrested for Sale of a Child. The Department arrested three individuals for attempting to sell an eight-week old infant as part of an investigation that began when the child’s grandmother approached a third party and offered to sell the infant for $75,000. The buyer, known to the subjects, worked with law enforcement throughout the investigation. After a series of negotiations, the price for purchase of the infant was agreed upon at $30,000. That’s when the grandmother agreed to meet the buyer met to complete the sale at a Daytona Beach shopping plaza parking lot. At the transaction, agents arrested the grandmother and her boyfriend and turned the infant over to the care of the Department of Children and Families.

The third individual, the child’s mother, was arrested for her role in the plot. She and her mother (the child’s grandmother) had discussed the selling price for the child and how the funds would be split. Investigators allege she had agreed to receive $9,000 for the sale of her baby to purchase a new vehicle. She was currently incarcerated in the Manatee County Jail on unrelated charges.

Former Hospital Officials Arrested for Racketeering and Fraud. In partnership with the Office of Attorney General, the Department arrested eight former high-ranking hospital administrators on various felony charges including racketeering, Medicaid fraud, money laundering, aggravated white collar crime and operating a scheme to defraud. The arrests are the culmination of an investigation into activities of Trinity Community Hospital in Jasper and its affiliated clinics in Columbia, Hamilton and Suwannee counties. Investigators allege the individuals engaged in a scheme of admitting Medicaid recipients to the hospital without medical necessity. The investigation also established $660,000 in state grant funds dedicated to hospital improvements were illegally used to support the activities of a criminal enterprise and diverted to the personal use of the hospital owner and its chief financial officer.

Sixty-Two South Florida Residents Charged with Public Assistance Fraud. In partnership with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Children and Families, the State Attorney’s Office (15th Judicial Circuit) and local law enforcement, the Department charged more than 60 public assistance recipients with welfare fraud. “Operation Easy Money” identified public assistance recipients illegally obtaining cash from government issued Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards which are authorized only for the purchase of approved food staples.

In April 2009, FDLE arrested the operators of Billy’s Market in Belle Glade on theft and fraud charges. Investigators subsequently began reviewing EBT transactions occurring at the store between January 2006 and April 2009 and allege various public assistance recipients used food stamp benefits to acquire cash and other items ineligible for purchase. Store employees rang up a transaction that indicated a food staple purchase, but unlawfully provided cash to the food stamp recipients and retained a portion for themselves. In most cases, few or no food items were purchased. The amount each recipient trafficked ranged from $2,000 to more than $14,000. Investigators estimate the individuals involved committed a combined $300,000 in food stamp fraud.
Eight Arrested in Six State, Multi-Million Dollar Burglary Ring. In partnership with the Attorney General’s Office of Statewide Prosecution and various local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, the Department arrested eight individuals involved in a high-end burglary ring that targeted jewelry stores and pawn shops in Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Connecticut. The arrests mark the culmination of a nearly two-year, multi-agency investigation of the group, based in Miami-Dade County, with multiple crews who would burglarize jewelry stores and pawn shops by cutting holes in the roof, disabling alarms and surveillance systems and using torches to access safes. Authorities estimate the value of the jewelry stolen at more than $6 million.

Fifteen Arrested in Two Separate Mortgage Fraud Enterprises. First, in partnership with the Attorney General’s Office of Statewide Prosecution, the Department arrested 10 members of a criminal mortgage fraud and identity theft operation responsible for $8 million in losses. Investigators allege the scheme included the recruitment of straw buyers, who were provided fraudulent Florida and New Jersey driver licenses and the personal identification information of unsuspecting victims. Using the victims’ identities, the straw buyers obtained credit and purchased properties for which they never intended to make any mortgage payments. The same properties were resold numerous times, often using the same scheme. The scheme was used to obtain mortgages on 14 different properties in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. The majority of these properties are currently in foreclosure as a result of the nonpayment of the mortgage loans.

Second, in partnership with the Attorney General’s Office of Statewide Prosecution and the Hillsborough County Consumer Protection Agency, the Department arrested five individuals for their role in a mortgage fraud scheme that spanned Pinellas, Pasco, Hillsborough, Hernando, Osceola, Seminole and Orange counties and other jurisdictions. The investigation centered around fraudulent mortgage applications involving 33 properties purchased from April 2003 to December 2007.

Investigators allege the subjects prepared and submitted 50 fraudulent residential mortgage loan applications and associated documents to deceive mortgage loan lenders. Ultimately, the lenders approved the residential loan applications and funded 50 loan applications totaling approximately $8.8 million. Of the properties involved, 22 were the subject of foreclosure proceedings which resulted in over $3 million in final judgments.