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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 30, 2017

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### **Automated License Plate Reader Leads Hopewell Police to Two Arrests**

Two Cuban nationals driving a stolen truck through Hopewell last week were arrested as a result of a new countywide Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) system, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri and Hopewell Township Police Chief Lance Maloney reported.

On March 20, 2017, at 2:25 a.m., Hopewell Police Officer George Peterson was on patrol on Route 31 near North Main Street in a marked patrol vehicle equipped with an automated license plate reader. The ALPR scanned the license plate of a southbound 2014 Ford F450 truck and alerted Peterson that the truck had been reported stolen out of Houston, Texas on March 13, 2017. A motor vehicle stop was initiated, and the driver, identified as Ernesto Herrera-Lesteiro, age 23, and passenger, Yonder Diaz-Sanchez, age 27, were taken into custody.

Credit cards were found in the vehicle that were not in either man's name. With the assistance of Detective Louis Vastola, it was learned that the cards were stolen during a robbery in Perryville, Maryland on March 17, 2017. With the assistance of Maryland State Police Trooper Christopher Wiley, the officers were able to connect Herrera-Lesteiro and Diaz-Sanchez to the kidnapping and armed robbery of a truck driver during that incident. Maryland State Police obtained extradition warrants and charged both men with kidnapping, carjacking, theft and assault with a knife.

Peterson and Vastola charged the pair with receiving stolen property and possession of marijuana. Both men, who are Cuban nationals and list an address of Paterson, New Jersey, were lodged without bail in the Mercer County Correction Center.

Law enforcement agencies throughout the nation are increasingly adopting ALPR technologies to enhance their enforcement and investigative capabilities, expand their collection of relevant data, and expedite the tedious and time consuming process of manually comparing vehicle license plates with lists of stolen, wanted, and other vehicles of interest.

ALPR systems function to automatically capture an image of the vehicle's license plate, transform that image into alphanumeric characters, compare the plate number acquired to one or more databases of vehicles of interest to law enforcement and other agencies, and to alert the officer when a vehicle of interest has been observed. The automated capture, analysis, and comparison of vehicle license plates typically occurs within seconds, alerting the officer almost immediately when a wanted plate is observed.

Utilization of the program in Mercer County began in the summer of 2016. The prosecutor's office funded mounted camera systems for 25 vehicles throughout local and county police departments.

Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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