

Use fewer witnesses in criminal cases

by UPI

NEW YORK -- Worry about protecting witnesses has prompted law enforcement officials in New Jersey to develop alternate methods for prosecuting criminal cases. A strategy of using as few witnesses as possible follows the killings of more than a dozen witnesses in New Jersey criminal cases during the past five years, The New York Times reported Monday. Instead of witnesses, cases are being made employing video surveillance, sting operations or police testimony. In the New Jersey State Police gang unit detectives have developed hundreds of cases in the past five years but employed civilian testimony fewer than a dozen times, the newspaper says. "It used to be that when someone gave information, the first words out of a detective's mouth were 'Are you willing to testify to that?'" Detective Sgt. Ronald Hampton of the State Police said. Today, Hampton says, civilian witnesses are considered evidence of last resort. Critics of the policy say cases made without witnesses tend to produce shorter sentences, allowing gang members to reduce or avoid punishment for their crimes.

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