

Bristol County District Attorney Sam Sutter's Office will hold its 200th illegal firearm related dangerousness hearing since District Attorney Sutter instituted office policy to request dangerousness hearings on all felony illegal gun crimes this Thursday in Fall River District Court.

The hearing will be prosecuted by the Deputy Chief of the District Courts, Assistant District Attorney Derek Coyne.

The case being heard in Fall River on Thursday is Commonwealth vs. Matthew Vultao. Mr. Vultao, 34, of 331 Sunset Hill, Fall River, was arrested by Fall River Police on January 3. He and his co-defendant, Veronica Roman, are accused of invading a Walnut Street home. The two defendants were allegedly wearing ski masks, and Mr. Vultao was allegedly carrying a sawed off shotgun when they entered the home occupied by a woman and a 1-year-old child.

Mr. Vultao is charged with four counts of firearm-armed assault in a dwelling, and one count each of possessing a sawed off shotgun and home invasion.

Since instituting the dangerousness hearing policy immediately after he was sworn into office two years ago, District Attorney Sutter's prosecutors have triumphed in 142 of the 199 illegal-firearm related dangerousness hearings held in the county's four district courts. During the past two years, Bristol County has seen a corresponding decline in illegal gun violence.

In 2006 in New Bedford, some 38 individuals were shot. Over the past 24 months, the rate of shootings has been cut by more than 50 percent. Reports of shots fired in Fall River and Taunton have also dropped since 2006. Fall River saw a 36 percent decrease in shots fired from 2006 to 2007. In 2008, reports of shots fired in Fall River have remained nearly the same as in 2007. Taunton also saw

its shots fired calls decrease from 118 in 2006 to 86 in 2007. The number of shots fired in Taunton in 2008 remained about the same, with the Taunton Police Department reporting 84 shots fired calls in 2008.

District Attorney Sutter also recently went before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court to argue that felony illegal firearm crimes are covered by the “Dangerousness Statute,” a law enacted in 1994 that allows for pretrial detention of 90 days after a judge finds a defendant “dangerous.”

During the arguments before the SJC, District Attorney Sutter maintained that the text of the statute clearly states that district attorneys may move for a dangerousness hearing on “any felony that by its nature involves a substantial risk that physical force against the person of another may result.” District Attorney Sutter has constantly asserted, in view of the dozens of illegal firearm related fatalities each year in Massachusetts, the Legislature unquestionably intended that the statute to cover this crime.