

Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force

City of Little Rock

Mayor Mark Stodola

May-June 2017

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## Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force Members

Mayor Mark Stodola	City of Little Rock
City Director Kathy Webb	Little Rock Board of Directors – Ward 3
Larry Jegley	Prosecuting Attorney – Sixth Judicial District
State Rep. Clarke Tucker	District 35
Judge Alice Lightle	Little Rock District Court – Criminal
Police Chief Kenton Buckner	City of Little Rock
Bob Birch	Public Safety Chair – Fifty for the Future
Dawne Vandiver	Arkansas Parole Board
Judge Mary Ann McGowan	Circuit Court, 6th Judicial District
State Senator David Sanders	District 15
Sheila Sharp	Arkansas Department of Community Corrections
Dr. Mary Parker	UALR Department of Criminal Justice
Dr. Stacy Moak	UALR Department of Criminal Justice
Randy Morgan	Pulaski Regional Detention Facility
Juan Carlos Hernandez	Hernandez Law Firm
Kevin Crass	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce
Judge Leon Johnson	Circuit Court – Sixth Judicial District
Ron Davis	Law Offices of Ronald Davis
Bill Simpson	Chief Public Defender – Sixth Judicial District

## Letter from the Mayor

Dear Citizens of Little Rock:

The Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force was convened to investigate ways to reduce crime in our great city. The Task Force comprised members of city and state government, law enforcement officers, corrections officers, judges, society re-entry organizations, and defense attorneys. The Task Force was charged with the duty to review policies and laws while investigating best practices that could be utilized to improve public safety, deter crime, and improve the community well-being. The Task Force did not seek to solve all crime or implement sweeping reforms of the current system. Rather, the key challenge posed to the Task Force was how do we optimize our current system to improve crime prevention and make our community safer.

The Task Force was uniquely suited to this charge. Being comprised of members throughout the law enforcement, criminal justice, criminal defense, and criminal re-entry systems, Task Force members had both the experience and the ability to change policies and procedures to improve public safety. The Task Force diligently carried out its duties and brought forth a number of helpful recommendations. For all their efforts and hard work, I, on behalf of the City of Little Rock, am deeply grateful.

In recommending changes to the current system, the Task Force continually reminded itself that crime is a complex social problem. Crime reduction is not solely the purview of law enforcement or the criminal justice system. Rather, the persistence of crime is a systemic failure that requires action from all levels of government and our communities. The recommendations the Task Force has produced recognize this complexity and need for ownership from all members of the community.

Because of this complexity, these recommendations are not meant to solve all crime in our great city. Indeed, some of these recommendations have already been implemented at other levels of government since the Task Force concluded. In order to address other issues not covered by the Task Force, my administration will develop recommendations for deeper systemic reform over the coming months.

I firmly believe that our great city can come together to address crime by finding innovative solutions to these problems. We will continue to use all the resources at our disposal to ensure that the citizens of Little Rock live in safe and vibrant communities that give them every chance to thrive.

Sincerely,

Hon. Mark Stodola

Mayor of Little Rock

## Introduction

In March 2015, the City of Little Rock Mayor, Mark Stodola, announced the formation of the Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force. The task force was established as there was an uptick in crime in Little Rock. The task force met monthly from April 2015, until April 2016. The task force was comprised of individuals from multiple jurisdictions and levels. The group included individuals from the federal, state, county and municipal governments. This initiative convenes experts in the field to examine public safety and crime prevention systems. The task force was charged with the duty to review policies and laws while investigating best practices that could be utilized to improve public safety, deter crime, and improve the community well-being. A variety of different topics were examined as outlined in the following pages.

## Executive Summary

This report contains the findings of the Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force and Mayor Mark Stodola's recommendations for action. As stated previously there were a variety of different topics covered throughout the task forces meetings.

- One topic that was covered extensively throughout the task forces meetings establishing courts to specifically address domestic violence. William R. Simpson Jr., Chief Public Defender, suggested "A National Portrait of Domestic Violence Courts" from the Center for Courts Innovations to give insight on the benefits of Domestic Violence Court. Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) handle domestic violence cases on a separate calendar or assign domestic violence cases to one or more dedicated judges or judicial officers. DVCs focus on victim advocacy, orders of protection, offender assessments and programs, compliance monitoring and reducing recidivism. The statistics on Domestic Violence in Little Rock suggest the necessity for the employment of DVCs. In 2015 there were 2,844 domestic violence incidents, an increase of over one hundred from the previous year. Of the 2,844 incidents, 46% were committed at repeat addresses. The creation and implementation of DVCs has the potential to lower the number of repeat offenders, provide victims and offenders with the necessary resources for rehabilitation, and improve compliance monitoring.
- Ron Davis, a criminal defense attorney at the Law Offices of Ron Davis, suggested the implementation of pre-adjudication drug courts based on their success on the federal level. Essentially, individuals arrested for possession of drugs would meet with pre-trial officers to begin treatment before their trials began, allowing the offender the potential to have already begun rehabilitation before their sentencing. Judge Leon Johnson, Circuit Court – 6th Judicial District, and Dr. Mary Parker, University of Arkansas Little Rock Department of Criminal Justice, agree that there is a lack of these types of services and that the implementation of drug courts has the potential to lower recidivism and help in the rehabilitation of offenders.
- At one meeting the topic of electronic monitoring was discussed at length. The task force listened to presentations from three different vendors, Freddy Thomason of Offender Monitoring Specialists, Leslie Anderson of Track Group, and 3M Electronic Monitoring. Each vendor discussed their product and how they could help the City of Little Rock deter crime, decrease the number of people in prison, and lower recidivism. The task force agreed that the State needs to upgrade and increase the electronic monitoring services that are currently used.
- Throughout the Task Force's meetings, there was much discussion about the utilization of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). One presenter noted that 82% of inmates suffer from substance abuse or mental health disorders and many lack the resources for support and help. Mayor Stodola suggested that Arkansas should replicate the federal ACA form and mandate each uninsured inmate fill it out. This would allow uninsured inmates the

opportunity to receive services depending on their conditions, reducing both costs to the state and the likelihood of recidivism.

- At many of the task force meetings the group suggested alternative sentencing programs. Alternative sentencing would be for defendants and clients that were arrested and charged with non-violent and non-sexual crimes. The alternative sentencing would keep non-violent and non-sexual defendants out of jail and prison with the hope of preventing recidivism. Additionally, it would save money in the long run.
- A suggestion that came out of one of the task force meetings stated that the City of Little Rock should create a Foundation for Effective Gun Violence Reduction Efforts. The Foundation would prioritize gun violence as a primary mission of the Little Rock Police Department, standardize the use of firearm terminology and establish a firearms investigation unit. Additionally, the task force discussed successful programs including the focused deterrence approach in Boston, MA, Project Exile in Richmond, VA, and Project Safe Neighborhood, a national violence reduction initiative. The task force also talked about gang violence, youth safety and violence prevention in schools, and the importance of working with federal firearm licensees.
- At one task force meeting, Larry Jegley, the Prosecuting Attorney of the Sixth Judicial District, made a suggestion about how to prevent theft. Mr. Jegley suggests that the City of Little Rock creates a Public Service Announcement with information about how to prevent residential burglary. He indicated what the announcement should instruct residents to write down the serial numbers of their electronics and lawn equipment, and that residents should lock their cars and not leave keys inside or near the car.
- The task force urged the City of Little Rock to continue supporting and working with the Arkansas State Fusion Center. The Arkansas State Fusion Center is a hub for the sharing of information between local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. The Arkansas State Fusion Center is housed at the Arkansas State Police headquarters in Southwest Little Rock, and has a dedicated team of analysts parsing and distributing intelligence gathered by law enforcement as it comes in.
- The task force read and discussed the Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing. The document contained a list of recommendations to be used to improve community oriented policing, new training procedures, the use of technology in policing, violence reduction for youth, and improving the safety of our nation. The Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force discussed the importance of the recommendations and what they could mean for the City of Little Rock, as well as for the United States.
- City Director Doris Wright brought the importance of the Youth Violence Prevention Initiative to the task force. She stated that it was an initiative that provided structure and discipline for at-risk youth. The task force discussed several of the programs that are already established in Little Rock. 0020



## Findings and Recommendations

### Focus Area 1: Domestic Violence

Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force members discussed the issue of domestic violence at length and looked at ways to address it. William R. Simpson Jr., Chief Public Defender, suggested “A National Portrait of Domestic Violence Courts” from the Center for Courts Innovation’s to give insight on the benefits of Domestic Violence Court. Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) are courts that handle domestic violence cases on a separate calendar or assign domestic violence cases to one or more dedicated judges or judicial officers. DVCs focus on victim advocacy, orders of protection, offender assessments and programs, compliance monitoring and reducing recidivism.

The Task Force discussed High Point, North Carolina’s success in reducing repeated domestic violence offenders. Under the High Point model, officers target specific criminal behavior committed by a small number of chronic offenders, offer them various forms of assistance, and threaten the offenders with sanctions if their behavior does not change. High Point reported a large drop in homicides between intimate partners since the implementation of its program. The Task Force felt that this program was appropriate to explore in Little Rock.

The statistics on Domestic Violence in Little Rock suggest the need for DVCs. In 2015 there were 2844 domestic violence incidents, an increase of over a hundred from the previous year. Of the 2844 incidents, 1315 of them were committed at repeat addresses, which is 46% of the incidents. In addition, there were 7 domestic-related homicides in 2017 thus far, representing 23% of all homicides in the city. The creation and implementation of DVCs has the potential to lower the number of repeat offenders, provide victims and offenders with the necessary recourses for rehabilitation, and allow for improved compliance monitoring.

#### Recommendation 1.1: Establish a Domestic Violence Court in Little Rock

Based on the Task Force’s findings, Mayor Stodola recommends the creation and implementation of a Domestic Violence Court in Little Rock, Arkansas. Judge McGowan offered to work with William R. Simpson to begin the planning process for the implementation of a Domestic Violence Court.

#### Recommendation 1.2: Increase the resources available to domestic violence victims

Mayor Stodola recommends increasing the city, county, and state resources available to domestic violence victims. It should also coordinate all local, state, federal, and nongovernmental resources available to domestic violence victims to ensure that all victims are being assisted and that efforts to service individuals are not duplicated.

## Focus Area 2: Parole, Probation, and Bail

The commission discussed the issue of parole, probation, and bail extensively. One potential recommendation concerned the use of electronic monitoring of high-risk parolees based on prior felony convictions. The committee also discussed an article in the Democrat Gazette by an inmate arguing for better rehabilitation services, smaller parole fees, and fewer parole meetings per week.

Since the last meeting of the Task Force, the Arkansas State Legislature has passed legislation reforming the Arkansas criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> This legislation prevents the automatic revocation of parole when a parolee commits a violation.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the legislation allows parolees to be sent to three newly constructed “Crisis Intervention Centers,” which will provide drug treatment and counseling.

### Recommendation 2.1: Ensure police have timely access to a list of parole violators

The Arkansas Parole Board publishes a weekly list of parolees who have not met with their parole officer as required. The Little Rock Police Department (LRPD) should obtain this list promptly on its release and disseminate it to officers. This will help ensure that LRPD officers can address parole violations promptly, before they trigger a complete revocation of parole.

### Recommendation 2.2: Upgrade and utilize electronic monitoring in order to reduce recidivism, decrease the prison population, and identify the risk factors of former inmates

The Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force members discussed the utilization of electronic monitoring in depth. Electronic monitoring utilizes a GPS unit worn on the ankle to monitor the movements of formerly incarcerated persons. Electronic monitoring allows parole officials and police officers to determine if and when a parolee has violated the terms of their parole, which is particularly important for felons with previous burglary convictions. Recent reductions in the cost of the system has made it more affordable, and the Task Force urges the State of Arkansas to consider implementing such a system.

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<sup>1</sup> Criminal Justice Efficiency and Safety Act of 2017, No. 423.

<sup>2</sup> In general, this provision only applies to individuals who have not committed any violent or sexual crimes. Violent or sexual offenders are still eligible for the revocation of parole in the event of a parole violation.

Recommendation 2.3: Review bail setting procedures to ensure dangerous individuals are not being released

According to Pulaski County jail officials, there is no set bail schedule for individuals accused of crimes. Instead, the duty judge determines the bail when the individual goes before the judge. The judge has wide latitude in setting bail. In some recent incidents, individuals released pending trial have committed additional crimes, both violent and nonviolent. The criminal justice community should investigate how bail is set in cases where an individual has a substantial criminal history or is substantially likely to re-offend before trial.

### Focus Area 3: Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Recommendation 3.1: Replicate the federal Affordable Care Act form and mandate all new inmates complete the form upon arraignment

Throughout the Task Force's meetings, there was a lot of discussion about the utilization of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Chris Murphy, of the Arkansas Department of Community Corrections, informed the Task Force that 82% of inmates suffer from substance abuse or mental health disorders. Many, moreover, do not have access to health care, addiction treatment services, or mental health services. The Eaton Agency has had success in getting inmates to fill out forms to apply for the Medicaid expansion or the private option under the ACA. Completing these forms while an inmate is incarcerated ensures that he or she will have access to services when they are released from prison on probation or parole. Furthermore, being enrolled in drug or alcohol abuse treatment may be treated favorably if and when a defendant is convicted and sentenced. The City of Little Rock should work with prison and parole officers to ensure that inmates complete this paperwork between arrest and adjudication. This will ensure that former inmates reentering society have access to mental health care and substance abuse treatment on reentry, reducing the likelihood that they will reoffend.

### Focus Area 4: Recidivism

Recidivism presents a major challenge for the criminal justice system. According to the Arkansas Department of Corrections, approximately 52% of inmates released in 2012 recidivated within three years.<sup>3</sup> Recidivating normally occurs within three years of being released. Inmates

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<sup>3</sup> ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, RECIDIVISM OF ARKANSAS INMATES: FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 RELEASE COHORT 2 (2016). The Arkansas Department of Correction defines recidivism as “parole violation resulting in an additional sentence, a technical violation of the terms of early release, or a new sentence resulting in incarceration subsequent to a discharge.” *Id.* at 1.

reentering society face a number of barriers, such as being unable to find a job due to their criminal histories or having a difficult time enrolling in school. In 2014, only 47% of prior offenders were working part or full-time. In some cases, former inmates' families do not want them to return home, meaning they do not have housing or support after being released. When the task force was meeting, parolees using drugs were given three bad drug tests before being returned to a judge. In many cases,

#### Recommendation 4.1: Establish an incremental facility for newly-released inmates

The incremental facility should help to connect former inmates with counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, if appropriate, and work with these inmates to find either employment or enrollment in an education program. This will help prevent recidivism among medium and high-risk parolees during the period of time when they are most likely to re-offend.

#### Recommendation 4.2: Make the city a one-stop shop for re-entry

The City offers a large number of re-entry services for formerly incarcerated people. In January 2017, the City hosted a one-stop shop day to provide a range of reentry and reintegration services to former inmates. The event included legal assistance for post-release record expungement and assistance with outstanding criminal warrants, help preparing resumes and applying for jobs, enrollment in educational and financial literacy programs, and assistance finding housing. The City also operates the Sidewalk Team and the "Rights After Wrongs" program to assist with re-entry into the community. Currently the City helps 40 to 60 citizens per month with re-entry services. The City should strive to be a one-stop shop for persons re-entering the community and should consider ways to ensure this is done on an ongoing basis.

## Focus Area 5: Community Policing

#### Recommendation 5.1: Address the LRPD officer shortage

The Little Rock police department currently has an officer shortage of approximately 70 officers. The officer shortage has hampered some of the city's crime fighting and crime prevention programs, such as prohibiting all of the department's community policing officers to focus their efforts on community policing full-time. Mayor Stodola advises that the City eliminate this officer shortage by following the recommendations of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, as recorded in the Police Officer Hiring Process Review.

#### Recommendation 5.2: Implement an ordinance requiring certain categories of businesses to have surveillance video systems

The Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force Members discussed throughout the series of meetings the importance of crime prevention. The ordinance would mandate that a plethora of

business categories including but not limited to, convenience stores, on and off sale liquor establishments, banks, etc. would have to install surveillance cameras in designated locations throughout the store/ parking lots. (A draft of the ordinance will be attached). The ordinance will benefit the business owners, customers, and the Little Rock Police Department.

#### Recommendation 5.3: Improve community crime prevention strategies

One member of the Task Force proposed that the City should issue a public service announcement containing suggestions for preventing residential burglary. Ways to keep property safe include writing down the serial numbers of electronics and lawn equipment, ensuring that cars are locked and keys are not left in the car, and that residents should report suspicious activity to the police.

#### Recommendation 5.4: Community-Oriented Policing

The City of Little Rock has previously received a grant from the Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office. While the COPS grant has been fully implemented, the LRPD currently has an officer shortage. Due to this shortage, the COPS officers are not able to devote all of their energies to community policing. The City should remedy this officer shortage to ensure that COPS officers can devote all of their time to developing relationships with the community and gaining knowledge that could be useful in solving or deterring crime.

### Focus Area 6: Youth

The City of Little Rock operates a number of programs and initiatives aimed at preventing youth violence. The Task Force reviewed the city's Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, which provides structure and discipline for at-risk youth.

The Little Rock Police Department operates the Our Kids (O.K.) program for young African-American men. The programs work closely with the Little Rock School District to provide mentoring and leadership and character cultivation. Students are rewarded with trips and honor assemblies if they maintain a GPA of 2.5 or higher. O.K. mentors also visit the students' homes and meet with their families. At the time the Task Force discussed the O.K. program, there was no waiting list for the program, but it had not yet been implemented in all schools.

The Task Force also discussed the Girls Empowered by Mentoring Sisterhood (GEMS). This program establishes partnerships with education institutions, parents, students, and the community to provide needed services to at-risk young girls.

#### Recommendation 6.1: Increase the number of officers available to the O.K. and G.E.M.S. programs to cover all schools

Sergeant Davis from the LRPD indicated that it would take approximately three or four more officers to cover all schools in the LRPD. Sgt. Davis also indicated that more mentors were

needed for the program. Given the promising success of the program, the City of Little Rock should work to fully resource the O.K. program throughout the entire city.

#### Recommendation 6.2: Focus City resources for at-risk youth

The City of Little Rock currently spends \$5.5 million per year on programs for at-risk youth. The City should improve efforts to better focus these programs and better-communicate the availability of these programs with appropriate youth and parents. Some possible ways to achieve this include setting up a committee of all government and private organizations that provide services to at-risk youth to ensure that all children who need help receive it. Another possible way to ensure that this happens is to work with the school district to ensure that counselors and students know that resources are available and how to connect to those resources if a child is in need.

### Focus Area 7: Violent Crimes

The Task Force reviewed a number of potential changes to the way the City addresses violent crime, particularly crimes involving firearms. The Task Force felt that it was necessary to establish a foundation for effective gun violence reduction efforts, which would include designating reduction of gun violence a priority mission of the LRPD, standardizing the use of firearm terminology, and establishing a firearms investigation unit. Other ideas considered included identifying criminal hot spots in Little Rock to allow for “problem-oriented policing.”

#### Recommendation 7.1: Establish a program to combat gun violence

The Task Force identified a number of ways to combat gun violence. The first way was to establish a gun tracking unit, which would serve as a clearinghouse for all information about weapons used for violent crime. The unit could also utilize the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearm’s e-TRACE system to identify weapons used by the same individual or other cases connected to a particular weapon and use this to help establish a firearms offender registry. The department could also condition all plea deals for individuals committing a gun crime on their divulging all sources where they have obtained firearms in the past. This would help officers to identify gun dealers who repeatedly sell firearms that are involved in crimes.

#### Recommendation 7.2: Work with federal law enforcement to increase the number of federal gun crime prosecutions

Because of the resources available to federal law enforcement as well as the ability to impose stiffer penalties on gun crime perpetrators, Mayor Stodola recommends working with federal law enforcement to increase the number of gun crime charges brought in Little Rock. This will improve the services available to individuals accused and convicted of gun crimes and will also increase the penalties for perpetrating gun crime. The LRPD could also work with state

and federal prosecutors to ensure that any plea agreements in the case of gun violence are contingent on the defendant revealing all sources where they have purchased firearms illegally.

#### Recommendation 7.3: Work with federal firearm licensees to prevent illegal gun sales

The LRPD should work with firearm dealers to ensure that firearms are only sold to individuals who can legally possess them. The LRPD should also consider joining the “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy” initiative, which is sponsored by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. This initiative attempts to stop individuals from buying a firearm on behalf of someone who cannot lawfully own a firearm. The LRPD could also set up an account with the ATF’s e-Trace program, which would allow the department to trace all firearms obtained through arrest or investigation to be tracked nationally. The LRPD could also ensure that they have a presence at gun shows and have a relationship with organizers to ensure that no firearms are sold without completing a federal background check.

#### Recommendation 7.4: Continue Participation in the Violence Reduction Network

The Violence Reduction Network (VRN) is a Department of Justice program to provide resources to local police departments in areas of the country with high levels of violent crime. The VRN gives these departments direct access to subject-matter experts, customized trainings to deal with violent crime, and a national conference to share best practices. The City should continue to participate in the VRN in order to keep improving its practice to further reduce violent crime in Little Rock.

#### Recommendation 7.5: Violent Crime Apprehension Team

In early 2017, the LRPD formed the Violent Crime Apprehension Team. This specialized police task force focusses on hot spots of violent crime and works to apprehend the perpetrators. So far, the VCAT unit has had substantial success in apprehending violent individuals and recovering weapons used to commit violent crimes. The City has established a second VCAT unit and should continue to fund and support these specialized units.