



Testimony
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Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on the Judiciary
Public Roundtable
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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

**Crime Statistics and the Washington D.C. “Crime Emergency:”
What is the “real crisis”, and how should we respond?
Let the crime emergency lapse.**

Crime, the causes of crime, and potential solutions to the Districts’ crime problems are more complicated and nuanced than they have been portrayed by law enforcement and politicians during the “crime emergency” debate. Criminologists and most law enforcement officials would agree that the reasons why crime rises and falls in a jurisdiction are complicated, and rarely does one factor explain the whole story. While the Metropolitan Police Department releases crime statistics all the time, only during this crime emergency did we see weekly and monthly changes in crime used as evidence of the “success” of these policies. Some DC neighborhoods still experience unacceptable levels of violent crime even after we’ve witnessed big declines in crime since the 1990s. The crime emergency hasn’t changed that reality.

What the police and politicians were saying and the broader context.

#1: Is juvenile crime, particularly, juvenile robberies, driving crime trends in DC?

Most crime is not committed by youth: Data from the Metropolitan Police Department shows that 94 percent of all arrests and 82 percent of violent arrests in 2006 were committed by adults. Among robberies—a specific area of concern in Washington, D.C.—sixty percent of the arrests were adults, not juveniles.

Juvenile robberies are not driving crime in DC: In the days before the crime emergency bill vote at council, the Chief of Police, the Mayor and others continued to refer to an “82 percent increase” in juvenile robberies. While the figure is correct, the increase in juvenile arrests represented a small number, 60 more robbery arrests (from 70

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in first six months of 2005, to 134 in the first six months of 2006). This, in a city that annually witnesses 30,000 reported crimes. A comparison of juvenile robbery arrests over the last six months of 2005 and the first six months of 2006 show that the number of arrests has remained consistent.

#2: Are more and more people in the National Mall being victimized?

The crime in the Mall is a fraction of the city's crime problem: Police District 104—the region of the Mall—accounted for just one percent of the robberies citywide in 2005. Districts 101 (downtown) and 102 (the Capitol, and Union Station) were responsible for around 7 percent of the reported robberies across the city. While most violent crimes fell in 2005, there were about 200 more robberies last year than the year before. Where did the growth in robberies happen last year?: Northeast (65%) Southeast (45%): Not the Mall, and not downtown.

#3: Since the crime emergency was declared, crime has fallen, so have these policies worked?

Did homicides decline because of the crime emergency measures?: Prior to the crime emergency being declared—even with the spate of deaths in July—homicide arrests were already down for the year.

Did violent crime decline during the crime emergency?: By time the \$8 million police overtime funds were to be fully spent (September 3, 2006), there were 143 fewer violent crimes reported in this six week period than there were in the similar six week period in 2005. This represents \$55,944 in police overtime spending for every violent crime that was allegedly averted. Other jurisdictions, such as New York—which do not have any of the DC crime emergency measures—also experienced a decline in crime during roughly the same period.

Did the curfew deter juvenile crime?: At a recent council meeting on the “results” of the juvenile curfew (from July 31 to August 22nd), the Chief of Police said that the curfew was making a difference by looking at two measures: 1) Fewer juvenile victims, 2) fewer juveniles committing violent crimes.

- **Fewer juvenile crimes?:** While the Chief says that juvenile arrests fell 46 percent between 10 pm and 6 am, that belies the fact that DC already had a midnight to 6 am curfew. Between the hours of 10 pm and midnight, the number of arrests fell from 15 to 13—*two fewer arrests*.
- **Fewer juvenile victims?:** What the Chief said is factually true: “there have been no reports of juvenile victims of violent crime on public space during the curfew hours.” This is a drop from five victimizations, to zero, during the 23 day period measured. Again, these are extraordinarily small numbers, and again, this belies the actual change in hours of the curfew (lowering the start to 10 pm): Of the decline from five to zero, two of the fewer arrests occurred during the hours of 10 pm to midnight.

4 # What is the true nature of the District’s serious crime problems?

With DC residents obviously more anxious, it is worth reminding residents that serious and violent crime—the kind of crime that people are most afraid of--doesn’t impact DC neighborhoods equally. Police districts 5, 6 and 7, Northeast and Southeast represent nearly 70 percent of the violent crime arrest (robbery is an exception, but not much of an exception). Of the 195 homicides in 2005, half occurred south of the Anacostia River, and none were reported in East of Rock Creek Park. It is regrettable, and certainly a cause for concern when pockets of robberies and assaults occur anywhere in the city, but it simply isn’t the same for public officials and the media to treat the crime problems experienced in DC neighborhoods as if they were the same. Public officials, including law enforcement and elected officials, have an obligation to make that point clear to DC residents, particularly when they encounter concerns about rising crime.

Proportion of City’s reported crime occurring in Police District 7, 6 and 5 (2006)

Homicide	69%
Sexual Assault	68%
Robbery	48%
Aggravated Assault	68%

Source: MPD, 2006.

5# If not police overtime, curfews, juvenile confidential records or cameras, what are the real solutions to DC’s crime problems?

In 2004, approximately one-third of DC youth lived in poverty and over 50 percent of youth lived in a household where no parent had a full-time, year-round job, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Kids Count. Also in 2004, over ten percent of DC teens qualified as “disconnected” youth, meaning that they weren’t working or in school. These young people are the mostly likely to have negative life outcomes.

At a recent presentation to a group of DC non-profits the Chief of Police said that this city needs to address the underlying “drivers” of crime. He identified the major drivers as: lack of quality education, poverty, unemployment / underemployment, family dysfunction, and lack of recreational opportunities. We should take this opportunity to get the council, law enforcement, and DC non-profits working together on a positive youth development agenda that seeks to deal with the drivers of crime and to reconnect disconnected youth.

Finally, this city and this council need to read the results of the recent mayoral primary very carefully. There was an attempt to politicize the issue of the councils’ crime emergency vote—an attempt to portray one of the candidates as putting the city’s public safety at risk by voting against the measures you are discussing today. The results of the primary are in, and we should all heed the lesson

I recommend that the council let the crime emergency lapse. Instead of focusing on ineffective measures, let’s instead concentrate on dealing with real solutions to the city’s crime problems.