

## Fraternal Order of Police Advertisements On the D.C. Mayoral Election in Context

In October, 2014, the Fraternal Order of Police D.C. Police Union issued an advertisement urging voters to vote for D.C. Mayoral Candidate David Catania (I)—the candidate the union has formally endorsed in the mayoral election. The data used in the advertisement was sourced to <http://crimedc.com/>, a website managed by the same D.C. Police Union. The advertisement, mailed to D.C. voters, sought to attribute selectively cited crime statistics to actions taken by Mayoral Candidate Muriel Bowser when she was a councilmember.

The advertisement says:

- *“Crime is up in D.C. this year, and Muriel Bowser is making it worse.”*
- Homicides are up “20 percent,” sex abuse “11 percent,” motor vehicle theft “10 percent,” and total crime “20 percent” *“this year.”*

The advertisement misrepresents the relationships between policies the D.C. Police Union has offered an opinion on, real crime trends, and the choices D.C. residents have around the best ways to enhance public safety.

The advertisement misrepresents the crime trend data and science behind criminology in the following ways:

- ***Violent crime is down in Washington, D.C.:*** The advertisement fails to mention that in the latest data from the Metropolitan Police Department, total violent crime in Washington, D.C. is down from this point last year (January 1<sup>st</sup>, to October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013), and this year (January 1<sup>st</sup> to October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014) by 10 percent. *There has been a bigger decrease across all the crimes covered under violent crime than four categories of crime the D.C. Police Union “cherry-picked.”*
- ***The D.C. Police Union advertisement selectively cites data to show crime is up universally, when it isn’t:*** It is common knowledge that Washington, D.C. is a far safer community to live in today than it was during the crime spike of the 1990s. The data the D.C. Police Union uses in the advertisement selectively cites crime categories that have *marginally changed* over a few months (for example, there was one more reported homicide as of this time over last year). The advertisement *fails to report categories where crime is down*. During the latest comparable time period, *robbery, armed robbery, arson, burglary, and overall violent crime are all down*.

- **There is no relationship between the policies the D.C. Police Union highlights and crime rates.** The D.C. Police Union advertisement says “another 900 police officers” are expected to leave in the next three years” – a predictive, future tense issue that has absolutely no relationship to current arrest trends.
- **Policing and the number of police do not determine crime trends or community safety.** Data comparing Washington, D.C. to other jurisdictions show that there is no relationship between crime rates, the number of crimes that are reported in a community or that occur, and the number of police that exist in a community. Seventy-four percent of states with fewer police officers per capita than the national average have lower crime rates than the national average.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, states that spend less money per capita on police protection do not necessarily have higher crime rates. Seventy-five percent of states that spend less than the national average have lower crime rates than the national average.<sup>2</sup>

Washingtonians deserve an accurate presentation of facts on these important public safety issues, not selectively chosen data that skews the picture and fails to provide context.

Washingtonians also deserve to have a police force that is well-trained, with the tools they need to respond to public safety challenges, and prepared to appropriately and fairly serve all parts of the City with an effective community policing approach. That said, most criminologists would agree that policing strategies and professionalism have some impact on crime, but that crime rates are affected by a much larger set of issues.

For more information, contact the Justice Policy Institute, 202 558-7974.

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<sup>1</sup> Tracey Kyckelhahn, *Justice Expenditure and Employment Extracts 2007*, Table 8. Per capita justice expenditure (fiscal year 2007) and full-time equivalent justice employment per 10,000 population (July 2007) of state and local governments by activity and state 2007 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010) <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2315>

<sup>2</sup>For more information, see, *Rethinking the Blues: How We Police in the U.S. and at What Cost* (May, 2012). Washington, D.C.: Justice Policy Institute.