

MEMPHIS CRIME BEAT POLICY INITIATIVES

Alignment:

Memphis has many stakeholders working to reduce crime. These stakeholders include public and private organizations as well as individuals. A barrier to success is the lack of a cohesive crime reduction strategy. Our research has shown that the Empowerment Network offers a best-practice model that should be implemented in Memphis and Shelby County. Started in Omaha, Nebraska, the 360 Model ([The Empowerment Network](#)) has a proven track record of success over its 15-year history. The program uses a 30-30-30 formula: 30% enforcement, 30% intervention, 30% prevention and thus is community based. The Omaha Police Department reports a 74% decrease in gun violence from 2008 to 2018. The homicide rate in Omaha is at a 40-year low with 90% of murders being solved. Currently the Omaha Police Department reports a 100% clearance rate.

Judicial Accountability and Reform:

Judges in Shelby County are elected rather than appointed. For this system to work optimally, citizens need to know how their elected judges are performing their duties. Memphis Crime Beat (MCB) believes in a Court Watch system that uses citizen volunteers to observe court proceedings. This information will be distributed to the general public so they can make informed decisions.

In addition, MCB advocates judicial reform that takes a hybrid approach to selecting judges. This program would use best practices from other states like Missouri, which uses nominating commissions to vet judicial candidates. Judicial candidates who pass the vetting process are

nominated for a 12-month term. At the end of the 12-month term, the public then votes on whether the judges should continue to serve. A Tennessee constitutional amendment passed several years ago to allow this system to apply to Appellate and Supreme Court judges. Memphis Crime Beat supports expanding this amendment to cover the lower courts.

Value of Life

Value of Life is an economic value used to quantify the benefit of avoiding a fatality. Value of Life statistics are used in wrongful death claim lawsuits. This cost-benefit analysis in western countries ranges from \$1 Million to \$10 million. If a life is worth somewhere between \$1 million and \$10 million in actuary terms, why don't our bail policies have a process to set bail that reflects the value of life for any attempt in taking a person's life?

This simple formula should be used in some type of numerically structured bail, especially for the most heinous crimes including first-degree murder, second-degree murder, vehicular homicide, aggravated vehicular homicide, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated robbery, carjacking, and aggravated burglary. Enforcing a bail Value of Life amount of at least \$1 million as part of a policy will keep criminals off the streets in Memphis and Shelby County while awaiting trial.

Explaining Bail in Memphis and Shelby County

In 2022, Shelby County created a new bail process that went into effect in February 2023. The new system created a new bail hearing courtroom; individualized bail hearings with counsel no later than three days after a person's arrest; an examination of a person's financial circumstances prior to a decision; court reminders; and imposition of secured money bail at last resort. Eight judicial commissioners set bail,

sign off on protection orders, search warrants, and affidavits showing probable cause for charges along with reviewing misdemeanor citations and other preliminary matters before cases move to General Sessions Criminal Court.

Since this new system was implemented, we have seen a rash of criminals posting bail after committing a crime and going back on the streets to commit additional crimes. [This link](#) provides some background. Beginning in July 2023, only a General Sessions, Criminal Court, or Circuit Court judge has the jurisdiction to set bond for defendants in Class A and B felonies along with assault on a first responder and domestic assault. MCB supports this change and hopes it will stop the revolving door of criminals getting back on the street after causing violent crimes.

Curfew:

Our organization supports the 1996 citywide ordinance that prevents children 16 years old and younger from being out between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday and 11 p.m. through 6:00 a.m. Friday through Sunday. Seventeen-year-olds may stay out one hour later. We support the efforts of the Memphis Police Department in curbing youth crime through this ordinance and recommend using the former Commercial Appeal Building (496 Union Avenue) as a temporary holding area for youth being detained.

Driver's Education:

We support a program where the State of Tennessee Department of Education makes Driver's Education mandatory in all schools. This would be made possible through a permanent funding mechanism

established to include the BEP (Basic Education Program) formula under the Department of Education.

Streetlights

Our organization applauds the efforts of MLGW in replacing the 77,000 streetlights in the City of Memphis with LED lights. In addition to the cost savings and supporting the environment, we see this as a major commitment to deter crime in Memphis. We hope that Memphis and MLGW follow the City of Chattanooga and others to create a wireless network where law enforcement has the ability to adjust lighting especially during criminal activity or where potential activity may occur. This eliminates dark spots in known crime areas.

Drive Out Tags

Crime statistics show that Memphis and Shelby County are seeing upwards of thousands of automobiles being stolen and used in crimes that use fake drive-out tags. We need to eliminate drive-out tags which, due to inefficiencies in the system, are often expired. Additionally, the licenses are paper and can be easily copied or sold online to criminals. The best solution to this problem is to decentralize the license plate program, letting certified car dealers distribute regular license plates for each sale with the purchaser required to pick up the month/year sticker at the county clerk's office within seven days. During the seven-day period, there will be stickers that are date-sensitive on the license plate that let law enforcement officials know the recipient is in the seven-day period. This would eliminate the issuance of drive-out tags.

Reserve Officer Corp

We support a robust Reserve Officer Corp (ROC). Estimates suggest MPD has at least 500 open positions. Fully employed MPD officers are faced with short staffing and escalating crime that can result in officer

burnout and increased turnover. Reserve Officers can reduce the administrative burden of police officers, thereby increasing effectiveness and job satisfaction. Ideally, ROC would be a recruiting lever as well.

MPD should partner with local high schools in the same way MLGW does to provide job training and experience so that, upon graduation, students would be positioned to finish their police training and qualify for a full-time position with MPD. At a time when it is very difficult to hire officers from other locations, a pool of local candidates would be a big asset.

MPD should, as part of a comprehensive law enforcement plan, include an ROC and commit to advertise, recruit, and train reserve officers to support the City of Memphis. In addition to local students, veterans and former and active national guard members should be recruited to the ROC.

Operation Blue CRUSH

Started in 2005 by former Police Director Larry Godwin and Criminal Justice Professor Dr. Richard Janikowski, Blue CRUSH (Crime Reduction Using Statistical History) was hugely successful because it used data to for hot spot policing that sent police to an area where crime was rampant. Blue CRUSH reduced violent crime by 23% from 2006 to 2013. We support bringing back Blue CRUSH as a community policing tool to eliminate violent crime in Memphis.

Truth in Sentencing

The “Truth in Sentencing” legislation passed by the Tennessee legislature in 2022 enhances sentences for violent crimes. Criminals who commit crimes including first-degree murder, second-degree murder, vehicular homicide, aggravated vehicular homicide, aggravated

kidnapping, aggravated robbery, carjacking, and aggravated burglary will serve 100% of the sentence. A criminal will serve 85% of a sentence for voluntary manslaughter, reckless homicide, using a firearm to commit a dangerous felony, the manufacture, delivery, or sale of a controlled substance and negligent homicide among others.

A California study of a sentencing law similar to this showed a dramatic decrease in a selected group of crimes in the first year. Within three years, crimes fell 20 to 40 percent compared to similar non-eligible crimes. We support the Truth in Sentencing legislation and believe it will be a deterrent to violent crime in Memphis and Shelby County.