



U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Deputy Attorney General

The Deputy Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

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MEMORANDUM FOR DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE EMPLOYEES

FROM: THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL *W. A. Minale*

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violent Crime

The Department is committed to addressing the epidemic of gun violence and other violent crime that has taken the lives of too many people in our communities. That commitment requires regular review to ensure that our approach remains effective, grounded in research, and consistent with our values. And this is an important moment for reassessment. After decades of falling sharply, preliminary statistics suggest that certain categories of violent crime increased significantly last year. We have faced a national public health emergency that put people out of work, closed schools, created pressures at home, limited social services, impacted criminal justice systems, and generally disrupted social activity. We have seen civil unrest as people question the legitimacy of our institutions and the role of law enforcement in society. We cannot be effective in guarding the safety of our communities without their confidence in police and policing. And we know that violent crime is not a problem that can be solved by law enforcement alone.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Building on past success as well as lessons learned, our work to reduce violent crime moving forward must be rooted in four key principles:

First, we must foster trust and have legitimacy in the communities we serve.

Meaningful law enforcement engagement with and accountability to the community are essential underpinnings of any effective strategy to address violent crime, as well as important ends in themselves. Distrust hampers the Department's ability to work collaboratively with those most affected by violent crime, to build a culture of respect for the law, and to be meaningful partners with community leaders. The Department's efforts to tackle crime depend on having trust and legitimacy with the communities we serve, so law enforcement is viewed as—and can be—an ally in guarding public safety. It is thus critical that we treat people with dignity and respect, establish a culture of transparency and accountability, and underscore our broader commitment to procedural justice and community policing.

Second, we must invest in community-based prevention and intervention programs. In recent years, community organizations have developed innovative approaches to intervening in the lives of those at the highest risk of engaging in or becoming victims of violence. Experience and research have shown, moreover, that prevention and intervention can be highly effective complements to the strategic enforcement of criminal laws. Although these kinds of programs are almost always best coordinated by local community and government partners, the Department can play a significant role in supporting them through grant funding, training, and technical assistance. We can also share our enforcement experience to help inform prevention and intervention approaches. These are important investments that will promote public safety in the places we call home.

Third, we must set strategic enforcement priorities. In many communities, violent criminal activity is concentrated in limited areas and committed by a small number of people who are often connected to gangs or other criminal networks. Many of them are violent repeat offenders. In other locations, intimate partner violence or other factors are the most significant concern. The Department is most effective when we focus our limited enforcement resources on identifying, investigating, and prosecuting the most significant drivers of violent crime—whether it is gun violence, domestic violence, criminal organizations, narcotics trafficking, or other forces. This strategic enforcement approach may not result in an increase in the raw number of arrests, prosecuted cases, or convictions, but it will improve public safety consistent with our values—the true measure of success.

Finally, we must measure the results of our efforts. It will be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the steps we take to reduce violent crime, and to make meaningful adjustments over time, without collecting and analyzing data on the incidence of violent crime. At the end of the day, our primary goal is to reduce the level of violent crime—something that can be measured by the number of murders, attempted homicides, aggravated assaults, and other serious violent offenses committed. Although many drivers of violent crime are outside our control, and federal agents constitute only a small fraction of law enforcement in the country, we must judge our collective efforts by whether they reduce the number of those offenses.

IMPLEMENTATION

Establish a Standing Violent Crime Reduction Steering Committee. To help ensure these principles are implemented in practice, I am establishing a standing Violent Crime Reduction Steering Committee that will be chaired by my office and will include representatives from the Office of the Associate Attorney General, the Civil Rights Division, the Criminal Division, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, the Office of Justice Programs, the Department's law enforcement agencies, and other relevant components. The Committee will meet on a regular basis to ensure coordination between components and to provide leadership and guidance for the implementation of this directive; it will also consult with interagency partners to discuss initiatives and potential joint efforts to reduce violent crime. In addition, the Steering Committee is authorized to make recommendations on all aspects of the Department's efforts to reduce violent crime, including policy choices, budget prioritization, research and data collection, and coordination with state, local, and tribal partners.

In addition, I am directing the following:

Strengthen Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). In the past 20 years, the Department has launched several nationwide programs to address violent crime in our communities. PSN remains the leading initiative that brings together federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and a broad array of community stakeholders to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in an area and to develop comprehensive solutions to address them. Given that gun violence drives the vast majority of significant violent crime issues across the country, addressing gun violence will remain a central aspect of PSN. To strengthen all of this work and to ensure it is aligned with our core principles, updated PSN strategic plans must be built on the following four pillars going forward:

1. Community Engagement. Our efforts to reduce violent crime in our communities are more likely to succeed where U.S. Attorneys are personally involved in this initiative and take proactive steps to engage meaningfully with the community. As the chief federal law enforcement officers in their districts, U.S. Attorneys should meet regularly with state and local counterparts, coordinate investigative and enforcement efforts, and convene stakeholders to discuss ongoing work to improve public safety. But they must also recognize the importance of being part of the broader communities they serve—to listen, learn, gain perspective, increase mutual understanding, and to collaborate around our shared value of justice and improving public safety. Each U.S. Attorney’s office is encouraged to consider hiring a community outreach specialist to help foster these relationships.

2. Prevention and Intervention. Effective U.S. Attorneys are problem solvers invested in addressing violent crime using all the tools at their disposal. This includes, to the extent practicable, providing support for evidence-based community violence intervention programs (such as violence interrupters and hospital-based interventions) and maintaining relationships with community organizations working to connect people in need to social services, economic opportunities, reentry programs, and similar resources. These relationships can foster collaborative approaches to the specific problems faced by particular communities. U.S. Attorneys should identify violent crime prevention and intervention programs in their districts and consider how best to engage with them as appropriate. As described below, the Department’s grantmaking agencies will enhance communication with the United States Attorney community to increase awareness about successful evidence-based approaches, as well as information on funding opportunities.

3. Focused and Strategic Enforcement. We must focus our limited enforcement resources on efforts that will have the most significant impact on violent crime in our communities, especially the gun violence that is often at the core of the problem. This begins with working collaboratively with federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement partners, including prosecutors, probation and parole authorities, and others, to identify the best available intelligence and information that will help to assess the violent crime challenges and the offenders who drive that violence. U.S. Attorneys and their law enforcement partners must then determine the most effective short- and long-term strategies for disrupting violent crime, recognizing that these efforts may vary significantly across districts of different sizes, with different balances of rural and urban areas, and depending on the nature of violent crime there.

And some activities may be so closely associated with violence of all kinds that it will always make sense to focus efforts there; for example, firearms traffickers who provide weapons to violent offenders can and should remain a focus of enforcement across the country.

Each enforcement strategy must include a mechanism for carefully assessing when particular offenders should be prosecuted in the federal system or if other jurisdictions might provide a more certain or appropriate sanction. This evaluation should also ensure that when we bring federal prosecutions we have confidence in how the underlying investigation was conducted. Each district's strategy should also recognize the breadth of the type of prosecutions that can help disrupt violent activity, focusing more on ensuring the law enforcement intervention is aimed at the most significant drivers of violence, and not aimed at enforcing particular statutes or bringing specific criminal charges. And, consistent with our overall data-driven approach, we must remain flexible enough to adjust our strategies as threats to public safety evolve over time.

The Executive Office for United States Attorneys will provide U.S. Attorneys with information on evidence-based enforcement practices from around the country to help inform this process, and will connect U.S. Attorneys and their teams with Department-sponsored training and technical assistance when needed. In addition, U.S. Attorneys are encouraged to partner with criminal justice researchers or other experts in data collection and analysis to help develop and inform their district-specific strategy. The Department's grantmaking components will be a resource for supporting this work.

4. Accountability. We must maintain mechanisms for regularly reassessing PSN plans and ensuring that they both remain effective and continue to adhere to our core principles. We must also recognize that the fundamental goal of this work is to reduce the level of violence in our communities, not to increase the number of arrests or prosecutions as if they were ends in themselves. But measuring that outcome can be difficult. U.S. Attorneys should assess any steps they can take to gather information about the incidence of violence and the effectiveness of the steps we take to address it. For example, we should encourage our state, local, and tribal counterparts to collect and share relevant crime data, to recruit the aid of outside researchers who can help analyze the impact of competing approaches to reducing violent crime, and to develop mechanisms for evaluating these kinds of data and research on an ongoing basis. Indeed, these are important tools that can help us more meaningfully review our strategies to tackle violent crime.

The foundations of PSN remain the same: Every U.S. Attorney's Office must implement its own PSN strategic plan that is targeted, comprehensive, and developed in collaboration with local stakeholders. Each U.S. Attorney's Office shall reassess its current strategic plan and make any adjustments necessary to align its plan with the core principles and program pillars described above. U.S. Attorneys should consider lessons from earlier efforts under Project Safe Neighborhoods, Project Guardian, and other initiatives to reduce gun violence and violent crime. But rather than implement different plans under separate initiatives, U.S. Attorneys should develop comprehensive Project Safe Neighborhoods strategies that address violent crime—including the gun violence that is often at its core. The new PSN strategies will serve as the overarching Department of Justice violent crime initiatives in each district.

Review Grantmaking Support. By funding research, investing in prevention and intervention programs, and supporting state and local officials through training and technical assistance, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, the Office of Justice Programs, and the Office on Violence Against Women will continue to play a critical role in strengthening the Department's efforts to reduce gun crime and other violent crime. As soon as practicable, those components must (1) identify appropriate ways to incorporate the core principles above into their programs and to increase efficiency in program implementation, (2) create an online resource for highlighting funding opportunities related to violent-crime reduction, (3) enhance the protocol for alerting a U.S. Attorney's Office when such a grant has been awarded in the district, and encourage collaboration between such grantees and the local PSN program, (4) establish a mechanism for routinely sharing information about the effectiveness of violence-reduction programs funded by the Department both with Department components and U.S. Attorneys' offices, and with the public, and (5) identify specific ways to support the development of district-specific violent crime reduction plans under the PSN initiative, such as enlisting a research partner to help each district with those efforts.

Align Activity of Law Enforcement. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the U.S. Marshals Service are on the front lines of addressing violent crime, and they all run initiatives or programs aimed at reducing it. As soon as practicable, those components shall review their existing programs and implement changes needed to reflect the core principles identified above, as well as identify whether there are additional efforts they could undertake to align their work. Like U.S. Attorneys, they should evaluate the best way to build or maintain trust and legitimacy, to set strategic enforcement priorities, and to measure success by the actual reduction in violent crime rather than an increase in imperfect proxies like the raw number of arrests made or cases charged.

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We are charged with the responsibility of seeking justice under the law. One of the most important components of that responsibility is doing all we can, consistent with our values, to reduce violent crime in our communities. It is a mission that affects not only whether people across the country are safe in their neighborhoods but also whether they have faith that we share the common goal of protecting the places we call home. Thank you for your continued work to achieve these goals.