

Testimony of
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Senate Committee on the Judiciary
on "Rising Violent Crime in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina"

This report attempts to identify the key issues affecting the New Orleans Police Department in a Post-Katrina metropolitan New Orleans and reflects the best information and assessment at the present time.

presented by:

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The criminal environment of the City of New Orleans is the product of many long-term, socio-economic factors, but it is driven to extremes by the massive, systemic drug culture and the violence that is engendered by that lifestyle. Law enforcement professionals understand the huge impact that poverty and the drug culture have on overall crime and it needs not be explained in depth for purposes of this summary report. For those not "in the business", need only look to the significant spikes in crime suffered by the communities that "hosted" large numbers of displaced residents from New Orleans, and the criminal element that was with them, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Now, imagine the crime problem these same individuals create when they are all in one city and you begin to understand the current situation in New Orleans.

NOPD Personnel issues -

NOPD's personnel losses since the storm have been extreme. Locally, we have no competitive advantage in recruiting qualified applicants. We suffered a net loss of 217 officers in 2005 and 216 in 2006. As of June 18, 2007, we have lost 72 officers. One Police Academy class has graduated in 2007 with 44 new field trainees. A second group is currently in the Academy with 45 officers. It is estimated that at the current annual rate of loss, by the time the second class graduates we will still have a net loss for the year to date. Our 2005 high was 1741 officers. We are down 505 officers until the two current recruit classes complete field training and graduate. Our current effective personnel strength (total commissioned members minus those on long term illness/injury and all recruits) is 1200. This is a decrease of 541 officers. This is a net loss of over 30% of our total 2005 personnel high-point.

Issues with retention -

For reasons ranging from working conditions (loss of buildings and infrastructure of the Department), living conditions (post-Katrina housing is still an issue for many), schools, cost of living locally (significant impact from increased insurance rates and utilities), we have had a significant increase in personnel losses due to resignations and retirements. In the past, the rate has averaged about 6-7% per year. It is now over 15% and shows no sign of declining.

New Orleans has lost over half of its resident population and a significant portion of its businesses. Neighboring parishes that were not devastated by flood waters have grown significantly, in both population and businesses. As a result, tax revenues in New Orleans have plunged and city services suffer, including the police department. Tax revenues in the unaffected cities and parishes (St. Tammany, Baton Rouge, and Jefferson) have increased significantly and allowed those areas to increase both services and salaries.

Many of our most experienced and technically trained personnel have left the NOPD for other, nearby law enforcement agencies for higher pay, better facilities and a better quality of life. At present, we only have 1 qualified firearms examiner and 1 fingerprint examiner left.

Over 85 firearms examinations alone are backlogged, as well as, over 1600 narcotics tests. Only a significant pay raise (more than just an offset to the local cost of living increases) will induce officers to remain and "re-evaluate" their retirement or career options, as well as allowing the department to recruit qualified applicants and officers from outside our immediate region. Based on national and regional data, an across-the-board base salary increase of 45 to 50% with some minimal, annual cost-of-living adjustment would be required.

Issues with recruiting -

For many of the same reasons affecting retention, recruitment has been a problem locally. Even with extensive advertising campaigns by the New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation (NOPJF), recruiting bonuses and housing assistance, the NOPD is still "fishing in the same pond" as neighboring jurisdictions that have similar or higher salaries. They too have been forced to raise pay and benefits to retain and hire additional officers. They also have actual or perceived better living and working conditions, a main reason the NOPD has lost a significant number of experienced officers and specialists to nearby departments this year. We do not have the pay and incentive package necessary to recruit from outside our immediate region. Recruiting already trained and qualified officers from other departments outside our region is the only way the NOPD can strengthen its numbers in the short term and gain experienced, qualified officers able to work the streets immediately in any effective manner.

We have outlined an ad campaign to recruit former military. As soon as personnel issues can be resolved with the POST Council on what military training can be counted toward POST training requirements thereby allowing former military to be treated as "lateral" entry, we will be able to actively recruit from this pool and possibly fill vacancies faster than a traditional "new" hire. Once again though, competitive pay will still be the determining factor for where these quality applicants will apply and work.

Learning curve -

Absent a significant change in salaries and benefits, the NOPD will continue to lose between 100-150 officers per year for the foreseeable future. Without immediate help from trained, lateral hires, we must rely on our own training of new recruits to replenish our ranks. The learning curve for new trainees is estimated at 7-8 months from the beginning of the Academy to their first permanent assignment after their Field Training Officer period. An additional 2 years of street experience is required after the Academy before they can function outside of a "calls-for-service" only capacity. With the staggering loss of senior, experienced officers and the crime problems facing the city, we cannot wait for new, entry level officers to gain experience. We must aggressively recruit lateral, experienced officers from other departments outside of our immediate region to fill our ranks and "hit the deck running".

Potential impact -

We have over 200 officers of all ranks eligible for immediate retirement with 25 or more years of service. Any additional significant negative impact on their working environment could cause a massive loss of these experienced members.

Personnel Assistance Summary -

The release of assistance currently being provided by the Louisiana National Guard (300 members) and Louisiana State Police (60 Troopers) will take place in November of 2007, after the active hurricane season has ended. The LANG has worked side-by-side with the NOPD in the areas of the City most heavily damaged and least populated, to provide the extra personnel required to protect property where there are no "eyes and ears" of citizens to report activity. The LSP has provided high visibility coverage in the French Quarter and Downtown area to supplement the NOPD where the density of visitors and citizens is greatest. The Louisiana State Police and the Louisiana National Guard have their own individual missions to meet and have graciously given of their limited resources for far longer than anyone expected.

The current class of police recruits will be completed with all training by the end of June 2007 and available for permanent field assignments. Another class should be available for permanent field assignments in December 2007. These classes, coupled with an active campaign to attract lateral entry personnel, our most reasonable estimate we for this year is 100-120 new officers by year's end. This may not offset the losses we expect of 195-210 (based on trends of last 2 years) due to retirements and resignations.

22 months after the storm, the NOPD is still operating in FEMA trailers. We have no HQ building. Three of eight District stations are still not repaired. We have no permanent Crime Lab facility (we moved to rented space at the University of New Orleans recently), no Central Evidence and Property storage facility, no Special Operations Division / Traffic Division complex, no Juvenile Division holding facility. None of the facilities lost during the storm have been repaired/replaced. We are in another hurricane season, which by all meteorological predictions will be active. We have an almost 50% likelihood of a storm affecting the city of New Orleans.

The lack of critical police facilities and capabilities is not only having a deleterious effect on the presentation and prosecution of cases, it has eroded the morale of the officers who see their best

efforts to combat crime stalled due to our inability to adequately test and evaluate the evidence and watch as the same offenders are repeatedly arrested and released.

The NOPD lost 300 patrol vehicles due to Hurricane Katrina. Of that number, 118 (2006 Ford Crown Victoria's) were replaced by FEMA and we were given 130 (2005 Chevy Caprices) from the LSP. We have not purchased fleet replacement vehicles since prior to the storm. Our practice had been to replace 100-150 per year. Excluding the vehicles replaced due to Katrina, our average fleet vehicle age is 7 years. A recent grant allowed us to install in-car video but we were unable to find 10 suitable vehicles in the Districts. During our response to the two tornadoes that struck in February of this year, our mobile command post was the back of a U-Haul trailer with a picnic table.

The NOPD is at a crossroads. We will never abandon our mission to "Serve and Protect" the citizens of New Orleans, but we are faced with the daily reality of an imminent collapse of our criminal justice institutions.