

Testimony of
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I wish to thank the committee for this opportunity to present a community perspective regards the justice system and violent crime in New Orleans.

The New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation is a non-profit 501(c) 3 founded in the mid 1990's. Our mission is to improve the Criminal Justice System in Orleans Parish through partnerships with a special focus on the New Orleans Police Department. Today we are also representing the views of the NOLA Anti Crime Coalition, a diverse consortium of over 15 community based organizations whose fundamental goal is to make New Orleans a safer place to live, work and visit.

The Foundation was born out of community outrage in the mid 1990's over police corruption and violent crime. Prior to 2005, almost all our efforts were focused on providing business practice and philanthropic assistance to the New Orleans Police Department. Although this approach had some level of success; we came to recognize the justice system was just that "a system" in need of reform. From the \$30,000 annual salaries for new prosecuting attorneys to the severe underfunding of the criminal and municipal court systems to the high level of incarceration needed by the Parish Sheriff to sustain operations the system was at best a fragile band aid on a major community injury that was slowly bleeding the city to death. With consistent annual police arrest rates of well over 100,000 in a city with a population of less than 500,000 it was becoming obvious efforts to simply "arrest our way" out of the crime problem were not working. Finger pointing was popular with judges blaming the DA, the DA blaming the police and the police expressing concern over the revolving door created by the DA and judges. A large portion of the community was disengaged, accepted the elevated levels of violence and considered the antics of system "business as usual". Other segments had grown to mistrust the police.

Hurricane Katrina washed all pretenses away and revealed the underfunded system and fragile financing structure for what they were. The storm also revealed the social ills that helped drive the crime problem, social ills that will not be fixed instantly and are shared with many other cities across America. With the return of violent crime a reenergized community identified justice system inefficiency as an issue that needed to be addressed.

Analysis conducted by the Foundation has identified a wide variety of systemic issues that feed these insidious inefficiencies. A list so long it seems almost overwhelming. We divide the issues into three separate areas; infrastructure, human capital, and operational business practices. I would like to take the time to very briefly address each.

Infrastructure is the nuts and bolts of the system. In spite of some success we have simply failed to restore the infrastructure needed by the Justice System in Orleans Parish. NOPD Headquarters remains in FEMA trailers with no central property and evidence. The Superintendant is dealing

with a third projected move-in date to their previous headquarters. Police districts operate from temporary space and in disrepair. The DA is in a third temporary location with no hard date for re-occupancy of his pre Katrina building. Baseline funding for the indigent defender program has all but disappeared due to reliance on traffic fines which are not generating revenue at pre-storm levels. The Sheriff has been forced to house offenders in tents; pre release and witness protection programs go unfunded.

Human capital keeps the system alive. Staffing is down across the board due to mandated budget cuts in budgets that were well below an acceptable level before the storm. The NOPD has lost about 400 police officers from a cadre of 1700. Recruiting has been at best difficult; attrition remains a problem. The Foundation documented over 80% of officers had significant damage to their homes. Some still remain in temporary living accommodations; others have simply left in pursuit of a return to normalcy.

There are success stories. The DA starting salaries are now in the \$50,000 range and Federal grants have helped to establish a violent crime prosecution unit staffed with highly qualified attorneys in the \$80,000 range. Over 500 first responders have refurbished or purchased new homes using private sector mortgage loan subsidies averaging \$5,000 provided through the Foundation. Police salaries have also been increased, residency rules have been relaxed.

In spite of these gains the facts are serious shortfalls and inequities in staffing levels remain. Critical interim hurricane recovery grants and funding that support human capital resources will soon expire with serious concern about the availability of alternative funding.

Operational business practices before Katrina were under serious scrutiny and it is now generally acknowledged the justice system was "broken". Basic police/DA communication processes were flawed; state of the art technologies and integration amongst agencies was absent, many business processes and information exchanges were seriously flawed and plagued with redundant manual data entry.

Post-Katrina, manual processes remain, but with significantly fewer support staff, thus creating long delays and inaccuracies. A joint effort with widespread participation has been started to automate business processes and information sharing to improve operational effectiveness and efficiencies. Progress has been made regards police/DA communication issues. NOPD has looked to improve operations through self examination using outside independent sources.

As I have said the task before us remains daunting and I have touched on only a few issues. I wish to thank you for this opportunity to discuss the crime issue in New Orleans.