

**Questions for the Record from Senator Charles E. Grassley for Rafael Mangual, the Nick
Ohnell Fellow at the Manhattan Institute
“Protecting Our Democracy’s Frontline Workers”
August 3, 2022**

1. What is the capacity of federal agencies to reduce violent crime at the state and local level, especially the Department of Justice (“DOJ”)?

Federal agencies can work to reduce violent crime at the state and local level in a number of ways, including, but not limited to:

- **Funding** the hiring, training, and equipping of more police agencies to increase their capacities to effectively fight crime¹;
- **Collaborating** with local law enforcement agencies (including police departments and prosecutors offices) through joint task forces to identify, and build meaningful cases against key violence drivers²; and
- **Prosecuting** a larger number of criminal cases over which the federal government has concurrent jurisdiction, particularly cases involving drug trafficking and firearm possession under 18 U.S.C. § 922.³

A. Do you believe the current DOJ is using that capacity effectively or efficiently?

The DOJ has limited resources, which ultimately requires prioritization. The Department’s leadership is in a better position than I am to evaluate whether those priorities can and should be shifted to maximize the Department’s impact on violent crime at the state and local level. I do believe, however, that working to reduce serious violent crime concentrated in and around large American cities should be among the Department’s top priorities.

B. What recommendations would you make for the DOJ to help reduce violent crime in the United States?

Through the mechanisms listed out in the response to question 1. above, I would recommend the DOJ work to redirect more of its budget toward partnering with state and local law enforcement agencies through joint task forces formed with the goal of identifying, prosecuting, and incapacitating through lengthy terms of incarceration the drivers of serious violent crime in the jurisdictions that constitute the most problematic violence “hot spots.”

¹ For insight into the degree to which policing is still underfunded in American cities, see https://eml.berkeley.edu/~jmccrary/chalfin_mccrary2018.pdf.

² For an example of the potential impact of this strategy, see <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pam.22323>.

³ For an example of a U.S. Attorney implementing this strategy, see <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edpa/fed-crime-gets-fed-time-public-awareness-campaign>.

2. Can you provide some examples of where the DOJ has been able to effectively reduce or mitigate violent crime increases?

In addition to the example set out in footnote 2, above, DOJ-led operations such as Operation Triple Beam, Operation Legend, and Operation Relentless Pursuit. These are efforts worth expanding on.

3. The violent crime spike that began in 2020 seems to have accelerated very quickly.

A. Has there been any point in U.S. history when the rate of violent crime increased so much in such a short period of time?

In September 2017, the DOJ [revealed](#) that the nationwide violent crime rate increased by 3.4 percent in 2016 from 2015 – the largest single-year increase in 25 years. Because of the lockdowns and resulting changes in “Routine Activities”⁴ related to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 did not see the raw number of violent crimes writ large increase as sharply.⁵ With respect to homicides, however, the 30% increase in 2020 over 2019 represents the single-largest one-year increase in homicides in recorded American history.

B. Can you explain why this increase was so fast?

What drives crime spikes is complex, and something approximating definitive answers will take years to arrive at through careful empirical analysis. However, potential factors include:

- the nature and extent of the post-George Floyd murder riots and protests;
- recent criminal justice reforms that helped drive reductions in local jail and state and federal prison populations;
- the decrease in the number of police in large urban jurisdictions; and
- Covid-19-related court shutdowns, police activity reductions, and prison and jail releases.

C. What does the rate of increase do to overloaded state criminal systems, and does that create a greater need for federal involvement?

The increase in crime can mean that police officers are spending greater shares of their time bouncing from call to call, which, in turn can minimize the capacity of a police department to do more proactive work. Crime spikes can also constrain the resources available for investigations, as detective squads end up having to do more with less. To the extent these problems exist, there is certainly an opportunity for the federal government to step in with new funding to help divert resources to the neediest departments, and to help fund expansions in the capacity of departments to handle a larger workload.

⁴ For an overview of the Routine Activities Theory of crime, see:

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0010.xml>.

⁵ For an explanation of why the “low” violent crime numbers of 2020 masked the problem of worsening crime, see: <https://www.city-journal.org/crime-fell-in-2020-but-we-were-not-safer>.