

Questions for the Record from Senator Charles E. Grassley
Hearing on “Federal Support for Preventing and Responding to Carjackings”
March 1, 2022

- 1. When dividing limited government resources between law enforcement initiatives and community violence intervention (CVI) initiatives, how should communities be allocating these resources?**

Communities must ensure that resources for law enforcement initiatives and CVI initiatives are balanced. Combatting violent crime requires a comprehensive approach, so resources cannot be dedicated to only one type of initiative. For example, Dallas PD’s Violent Crime Reduction Plan includes both enforcement action and CVI initiatives. In addition, Mayor Johnson’s Task Force of Safe Communities program also includes CVI and other proven community-based strategies to reduce violence. Our city council has provided adequate funding for the police department and these other programs. As a result of this layered approach, the most significant crime reductions in Dallas are occurring in neighborhoods where both the Violent Crime Reduction Plan strategies and the Mayor’s Task Force on Safe Communities programs are deployed.

- 2. In both your oral and written testimonies, you mentioned ghost guns. To what extent have ghost guns affected the Dallas area? What trends are you seeing in Dallas with respect to ghost guns?**

While ghost guns are not as serious of an issue in Dallas, overall, MCCA members have experienced significant increases in the number of ghost guns in their jurisdictions. According to a membership-wide survey, from May 2019-May 2021, MCCA members saw a 408% increase in criminal incidents involving a ghost gun. These firearms were most often used in aggravated assaults, homicides, and robberies. The survey also identified significant increases (more than 200%) in the number of criminal incidents involving ghost guns perpetrated by prohibited persons, gang-related individuals, and offenders with a previous conviction for a gun crime.

- 3. What role does industry have to play in solving carjacking?**

Industry is a valuable partner when it comes to recovering carjacked vehicles. However, while industry tools can be helpful, if you need to use them, it means someone has been victimized. Therefore, the idea that industry can solve the rise in carjackings is misguided. Responding to carjacking is law enforcement’s responsibility, and law enforcement will continue to focus on preventing carjackings from occurring in the first place.

- 4. To what extent is COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic to blame for the rise in both carjacking and violent crime nationwide?**

In my opinion, it is too early to determine what role the COVID-19 pandemic played in the rise in carjacking and violent crime. There is currently not enough data available to draw conclusions or make correlations.

5. How effective would having industry recovery standards be in *preventing* carjackings?

It is unlikely that industry recovery standards would be an effective means to prevent carjackings. Such standards would likely not be a significant deterrent for individuals willing to stick a gun in someone's face or otherwise utilize force to commit a carjacking. Furthermore, a large portion of the carjackings in major cities are perpetrated as part of other criminal activity or to go on joyrides. In both these circumstances, the offender typically is not in possession of the car for a long enough period where industry recovery standards would have much of an impact. The most effective method for preventing carjackings is proactive policing, which will drive down robberies, violent crime, and carjackings overall.

6. What kinds of trauma response trainings would be beneficial for improving the mental health of your officers?

The MCCA has continually advocated for a comprehensive approach to officer health and wellness that addresses physical, mental, and emotional health. Officers frequently encounter stressful and traumatic situations throughout their careers, and they must have access to resources to help them healthily process these incidents, including trauma-response training. MCCA members have also reported that peer counseling programs are an extremely valuable resource.

7. Which gangs and criminal organizations are the most involved in carjackings?

In major cities, carjacking crews tend to be most involved. These crews are not necessarily affiliated with a more traditional gang or criminal organization. In Dallas, we responded to serial carjacking crews who would use stolen vehicles to go on crime sprees, including robberies and aggravated assaults. Groups of juveniles also perpetrate many carjackings. These juveniles often commit these crimes to go on joyrides or gain notoriety on social media. The most prominent example is the "Kia Boys" in Milwaukee.

8. Of the guns you recover, how many are legally sold and then used in crimes? How many are illegally possessed?

Most of the crime guns officers recover are illegally possessed and can be traced to a few unique sources. Although it's not as large of an issue in Dallas, there is a proliferation of ghost guns in other major cities across the country. Firearms stolen from vehicles and homes are increasingly being used in crimes or recovered from violent offenders. Finally, several MCCA members have found that criminals are using various types of unemployment and other fraud to finance purchases of weapons that are later used to commit violent crimes. More must be done to keep guns out of the hands of violent offenders, and if these individuals are arrested while in possession of a firearm, they must be held accountable.

9. I have often heard from police officers in certain jurisdictions that it is preferable to take a case involving a serious violent crime or a drug trafficking offense to federal prosecutors rather than state authorities because the alleged criminal will be more likely to be detained pre-trial. Is that accurate for MCCA member cities?

Yes, this is accurate. Some MCCA members have struggled with state and local judges releasing violent and repeat offenders on either PR or very low bonds. Pursuing federal charges for violent criminals can provide an avenue to overcome this challenge. In addition, the prospect of federal charges serves as a powerful deterrent.

**Senator Marsha Blackburn
Questions for the Record to Chief Edgardo Garcia**

- 1. Very closely related to the topic of carjackings is the rapid increase in the theft and trafficking of catalytic converters across Tennessee and the entire nation. Your peers work diligently to curb these thefts and put an end to these out-of-control and dangerous crime sprees. Could you please discuss how catalytic converter thefts have impacted your department and city, and what policy changes could be helpful in preventing these thefts?**

Some carjackings are perpetrated for financial gain, which can include catalytic converter theft. In light of the ongoing supply chain challenges, the precious metals in catalytic converters and other car parts have become even more valuable. As a result, some perpetrators will commit a carjacking and then immediately take the vehicle to a chop shop to sell it for parts.

Congress should consider updating federal law to account for the increase in thefts of auto parts with precious metals, especially catalytic converters. New criminal penalties and regulations will serve as a powerful deterrent and help ensure those who buy and sell stolen catalytic converters are held accountable. In addition, improving record-keeping on catalytic converter sales and requiring catalytic converters to be marked with a unique identification number would bolster law enforcement's efforts to solve cases when these thefts occur.

**Questions from Senator Thom Tillis
for Chief Eddie Garcia**

- 1. Chief Eddie Garcia, can you provide a brief overview of the plan that you implemented in May 2021 to decrease crime?**

The Dallas Police Department's Violent Crime Reduction Plan relies heavily on science and crime data, was developed in conjunction with criminologists, and includes short-term, mid-term, and longer-term strategies to reduce violent crime. The short-term strategies in the plan focus on hot spots policing. We broke the city of Dallas down into microgrids and focused on the roughly 50 grids responsible for 10% of all violent crime in the city. Based on crime analysis and mapping, DPD deployed a highly visible police presence to these grids at the times when violence is most often reported. In addition, DPD teams focused on surveilling, deterring, and arresting repeat violent offenders on other high-crime grids. These hot spots are reviewed and adjusted as needed every 90 days. This approach has

been successful, and the mix of engagement and enforcement has driven down violent crime in these grids by 50%.

The plan's mid-term strategies consist of Place Network Investigations. These consist of a variety of government agencies, non-profit and community-based groups, and other stakeholders working together to address crime and drivers of crime in a given location. Place Network Investigations combine traditional law enforcement efforts with code enforcement, abatement, environmental design changes, and other actions. By strengthening the neighborhood and reinvesting in the community, these strategies seek to alter a location's criminogenic nature.

The longer-term strategies included in the plan emphasize focused deterrence and urban blight abatement. Focused deterrence seeks to change the behavior of high-risk offenders through a combination of incapacitation, community involvement, and alternatives to violence. This consists of continued engagement between law enforcement and high-risk offenders, including providing these individuals with social services, education, and job training. Community violence interventions are also a key component of DPD's focused deterrence strategy. The police department will continue to work closely with other city agencies, non-profits and community groups, and other leaders in the community to implement this portion of the strategy.

2. Chief Garcia, what resources do you believe our law enforcement officers need to do their job?

Law enforcement agencies need the requisite personnel and technology to ensure officers can engage in proactive policing. This will be necessary to drive down violent crime, but, unfortunately, proactive policing has become a luxury for many departments that are contending with high murder rates and low staffing. Congress should also strongly consider providing local law enforcement agencies with additional assistance to help address staffing shortages, enhance forensic capabilities to process new evidence and work through existing backlogs, and further deploy investigative tools, such as gunshot detection technology.

What challenges are you facing with recruitment and retention of officers in your office? What trends are contributing to these challenges, and what can be done to improve the recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers both in your county and across the country?

Local law enforcement agencies, including Dallas PD, are facing a variety of staffing challenges. Law enforcement officers are frustrated by the current situation. Increases in violent crime, the failure of the rest of the criminal justice system to hold violent and repeat offenders accountable, and anti-police rhetoric have negatively impacted officer morale. The confluence of all these factors has produced record levels of attrition. As a result, law enforcement agencies will need additional resources to address recruitment and retention challenges. Given the challenges with morale, unequivocal support for law enforcement from elected officials will also be critical. For example, many MCCA members have reported that officers are leaving for smaller departments where the political climate tends to be more publicly supportive of law enforcement.

3. Chief Garcia, do you believe that lenient penalties that criminals are receiving are making our communities less safe and putting our officers in danger?

Yes, I do. Lenient penalties have produced a situation where violent and chronic offenders cycle through the criminal justice system. This is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the rise in violent crime, especially since these offenders continue to face no consequences for their actions. Lenient penalties also allow these offenders to continue to prey on our communities and contribute to cycles of retaliatory violence. The failure of the criminal justice system to hold violent offenders accountable drains law enforcement resources, hurts officer morale and the public's perception of law enforcement, and is detrimental to public safety and the rule of law.