



For More Information

Contact:

John J. Pastuovic

312-372-0101, ext. 240 voice

Chicago Crime Commission proposes solutions for reducing gang violence

Plan includes increasing manpower, new gang units, and hard prison time for offenders

September 25, 2012 - Chicago, IL –The Chicago Crime Commission is strongly urging two practical responses to address the daily deadly gang violence that continues to plague the city of Chicago. The Chicago Crime Commission proposes that the city move immediately to increase the number of sworn police officers by 1,400 and work to prosecute armed gang members to the fullest extent of the law. These responses are designed to refocus the dialog on realistic solutions that will have a long-term effect on reducing violent gang-related crime in the city.

“Every day of every week Chicago is experiencing a heartbreaking tragedy. Gang bangers armed with guns are killing and wounding innocent men, women and children as well as other gang members,” according to Art Bilek, Executive Vice President of the Chicago Crime Commission.

“In 2011, 147 people were killed in Chicago in gang-related homicides. More alarming, those fatality levels will likely be eclipsed this year considering the fact that 120 people have been already been killed in gang related homicides in the first five months of 2012,” he added.

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“While we commend the efforts of the Chicago Police Department, the new federal strike force and other law enforcement agencies, the plain truth is that local law enforcement is simply understaffed and overwhelmed,” Bilek continued. “Increasing manpower by 1,400 sworn officers will provide law enforcement leaders with the flexibility necessary to respond with increased police presence in gang hot spots while maintaining an adequate law enforcement presence throughout the rest of the city,” he commented.

Art Bilek and Loyola University Associate Professor Robert Lombardo worked together to reach these proposed manpower figures by comparing the number of sworn officers actually working in patrol operations with the number of established beats and nationally recognized norms for police patrol manpower.

Figures for sworn police personnel in the Chicago Police Department are usually reported as 12,500. However, there may be only 7,500 officers working in patrol positions, which are the workhorses and backbone of the department. “The unfortunate truth is that many beats in Chicago go unmanned every day due to manpower shortages. The recommended increase in police manpower will allow for fully staffed police beats 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The proposed staffing levels will also allow law enforcement management to have the flexibility to respond with 400 specially trained officers who will work two gang strike forces – one on the West Side and one on the South Side,” Bilek said.

“The conversation must stop about whether the death and injured rate is up or down for the month or the year. The truth remains that 20 to 30 dead and 100 wounded a month are intolerable figures. The time has come to take extraordinary measures to reduce these numbers. We’re talking about saving human lives,” Bilek continued.

“We applaud Mayor Rahm Emmanuel and his pledge to control taxes by limiting spending. However, when it comes to law enforcement and community public safety needs, the city’s circumstances have changed and must be addressed,” Bilek stressed.

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“Today many residents of the city live and work within gang operation areas. Gangs constitute an entire sector of Chicago’s population, yet even the law enforcement organizations that watch them daily cannot precisely gauge the extent of their presence. Gangs’ mode of operation exists fully apart from civil society, but the repercussions of their gun and drug related activities directly affect society’s and the community’s well-being,” Bilek added.

“In an attempt to aid in the gentrification of squalid neighborhoods, the city tore down many of its gang-ridden housing projects and forced families to seek residence elsewhere, usually in areas where they were unfamiliar,” said Bilek. “Now, due to the massive relocations caused by the closing of public housing, accountability between gang leader and gang member has weakened. Street gangs, both large and small, have splintered into factions who controls only a few blocks. If displaced gang members want new territory, they have to fight for it, which in turn has resulted in one of the nation’s highest homicide rates for any major city,” he continued.

The second part of the Chicago Crime Commission’s proposal focuses on a renewed effort to prosecute armed gang members to the fullest extent of the law and with the maximum penalties allowed. The Cook County State’s Attorney and the U.S. District Attorney must assist in training the police to develop appropriate evidence for successful gun violation offenses and direct major resources to properly prosecute these cases.

“The Chicago Crime Commission proposes prosecuting offenders under federal laws when applicable,” Bilek said. “If consequences include hard time in federal prison without the possibility of parole and away from family and friends, gang members are going to think differently about carrying guns. Every gun carrying gang member that is removed from the city’s streets means one less opportunity for actions with tragic consequences,” he noted.

“By increasing law enforcement manpower levels and taking a tough stand on prosecutions, we will send a message to the gang bangers that law enforcement means business and will not tolerate this senseless violence any longer. Similarly, local residents and businesses will become safer and able to live and work securely in Chicago’s neighborhoods as a result of this powerful two-pronged approach,” Bilek concluded.

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