



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

November 14, 2011

2011-R-0335

## **STRATEGIES CITIES HAVE ADOPTED IN RESPONSE TO CRIME**

By: Veronica Rose, Chief Analyst

This report briefly describes randomly selected initiatives cities nationwide have taken to address violence, including gun and gang violence. OLR Report [2010-R-0341](#) contains additional programs from Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Washington, D.C.

### **FIREARMS**

#### ***Gun Buy-Back Programs***

Gun buyback programs gained popularity in the violent crime waves of the 1980s, and many communities, including some in Connecticut, have used the programs as a way to reduce gun violence. Typically, participating police departments offer people cash or gift certificates as an incentive to turn in firearms. A recent New York program paid \$200 for each firearm surrendered.

Law enforcement officials are among the most ardent supporters of gun buyback programs. They argue that reducing the number of guns in circulation reduces the risk of gun violence. But some research suggests that the programs have no observable effects on gun crime or gun-related injuries. Further, critics contend that the programs are sometimes abused by gun dealers and others seeking to unload junk firearms at a good price and typically net firearms that rarely would have been used in crimes. Some critics also contend that (1) people who typically turn in firearms are not generally those involved in gun crimes and (2) some people who turn in firearms use the money to buy other more sophisticated firearms.

## ***Gun Bounty and Firearm Tip Reward Programs***

Gun bounty or firearm tip programs pay cash rewards for anonymous tips about illegal weapons. The reward amount usually depends on the number and type of firearms recovered and whether an arrest is made. One such program, currently operated by the St. Petersburg Police Department, provides \$1,500 for any confidential tip leading to an arrest, recovery of an assault weapon (\$1,000 for other firearms), and a gun charge.

(For more information on the St Petersburg program, visit <http://www.stpete.org/police/publicinterest/gun-bounty-program.html>.)

## ***Gun Amnesty Programs***

These programs, under specified circumstances, grant amnesty to people who voluntarily surrender firearms or ammunition to law enforcement agencies (see, for example, D.C. Official Code § 7-2507.05 (a)).

## ***Hartford Shooting Task Force***

On July 5, 2011, a group of local, state, and federal law enforcement officials established the Hartford Shooting Task Force to investigate gun violence and prosecute perpetrators.

The task force of approximately 30 members consists of officials from the East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, and West Hartford police departments; Connecticut State Police; Chief State's Attorney's Office; Department of Correction; Board of Pardons and Paroles; Probation Office; federal Drug Enforcement Administration; and prosecutors in the Hartford and Waterbury judicial districts. The task force meets regularly with representatives from the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

According to James Rovella, chief inspector in charge of the task force, the task force was initially formed because of a problem identified in Hartford—"900 people shot in the last five years. The crimes were either under-investigated or not investigated at all for a variety of reasons." The team has over time expanded its role to include investigation of serious assaults, gun possession by felons, drug possession, and homicide, among other things.

The task force reported the following statistics as of November 10, 2011:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number</b>
Violence cases being investigated	> 70
Fully functional firearms seized	> 30
Search and seizure warrants directly related to violence served	> 20
Arrests made	> 80

According to Rovella, task force operations have resulted in the seizure of large amounts of marijuana, heroin, and crack-cocaine. Also, (1) January through November 5, 2010, there were 156 shooting victims compared with 123 for the same period in 2011, a 21.2% decrease, and (2) the monthly homicide average has fallen from approximately three to less than one per month.

(For more information on this program, contact James Rovella at [James.Rovella@po.state.ct.us](mailto:James.Rovella@po.state.ct.us).)

### **Gun Ordinances**

In an effort to reduce gun violence, some local jurisdictions, including Washington, D.C., have passed restrictive firearm laws. The District's 1975 Firearms Control Regulations Act prohibited residents from owning handguns and required permitted firearms to be disassembled and fitted with a trigger lock. In 2008, the U.S. Supreme struck down the legislation on the grounds that it violated an individual's right to keep and bear firearms for lawful uses such as self defense in one's home (*District of Columbia v. Heller*, 128 S. Ct. 2783 (2008)).

### **OPERATION SAFE STREETS—PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

Phoenix, Arizona, implemented "Operation Safe Streets" (OSS) in 1990, a year when there were reportedly 580 gang-related violent incidents in the city, including almost 200 drive-by shootings.

OSS' stated goals were to (1) reduce gang-related violent offenses by 5% over the summer, (2) investigate 95% of the violent crimes involving street gangs, (3) respond within five days to all citizens' complaints of criminal street gang activity in their neighborhoods, and (4) maximize the enforcement of gun violations through both state and federal prosecutions.

A federal Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms agent assigned to OSS reviewed firearm violations to determine if they qualified for federal prosecutions. OSS relied on local residents to call a local hotline to report suspicious activities and help officials identify gang members. Also, police officers attended public meetings to report on police activities and build community support. A \$150,000 budget covered overtime costs for more than 70 law enforcement officers assigned to OSS from various law enforcement agencies and units.

According to one study, “police statistics for OSS in 1998 indicate that gang-related violent crimes were reduced by one-third compared to the previous summer.” (For more information on the study, see [http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun\\_violence/profile22.html](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/profile22.html).)

### **OPERATION CEASEFIRE—BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

In 1996, Boston implemented “Operation Ceasefire” in response to a surge of gun violence in several communities. The program, which focused on illicit gun trafficking and gang violence, was a collaborative effort involving local, state, and federal law enforcement officials; outreach workers; and local service providers.

The program targeted gang members who were not complying with their probation terms with aggressive enforcement of probation and other related violations, and made numerous arrests. Probation, police officers, and other program participants met informally and formally with gang members in their homes, schools, and elsewhere and informed them of the program’s zero tolerance policy and the criminal justice consequences of their violent behavior. The city-employed outreach workers sought out at-risk youths and provided them with services such as job skills training, substance abuse counseling, and special education.

Various studies credit the operation with a significant reduction in youth homicide and decrease in the number of new guns recovered by the Boston police (see for example, <http://www.ncjrs.gov/app/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=189562>).

Several other cities, including Los Angeles, have replicated the Ceasefire model. Results in Los Angeles were mixed, according to one National Institute of Justice study. Overall, violent crime fell significantly, as did gang crime at first, while gun crime did not decline. The researchers concluded that the collaboration between the private and public agencies and community groups was the most important

factor contributing to the decline in crime. The collaboration “proved that diverse criminal justice organizations can work together effectively . . . Each agency has unique resources that, when pooled with those of other agencies, make it more effective than it would have been working alone” (see *Reducing Gun Violence: Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles*, p. 19 at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/192378.pdf>)).

## **OPERATION NIGHT LIGHT—BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

In 1992, in response to a rise in homicide victims under age 17 and heightened gang violence, Boston implemented “Operation Night Light,” a program that focused on youth violence, especially high-risk offenders, and the illegal gun market in certain inner city neighborhoods. In a collaborative effort, police and probationers worked together to address the problems. Police officers worked on overtime and regular shifts; probation officers used flex and compensation time.

The program paired one probation officer with two police officers to make unannounced visits to homes, schools, and job sites of high-risk youth probationers between 7 p.m. and midnight, instead of the usual 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Probation officers developed lists of high-risk probationers based on their own risk assessment or other recommendations and, four nights per week, the teams visited their homes. The goal was to ensure that gang members and other high-risk offenders complied with their probation terms. The teams collaborated closely with judicial officials to set new probation terms for offenders who violated their probation.

Although arrests were made for on-site criminal activity, such as open drug dealing, preventing recidivism was more important than arrests and seizures. Some studies credit the program with reducing juvenile homicide rate, improving probation compliance, and increasing public safety (see e.g., Kent Reichert, “*Police-Probation Partnerships: Boston’s Operation Night Light*,” *Promising Approaches to Addressing Crime*, March 2002, [http://www.sas.upenn.edu/jerrylee/programs/fjc/paper\\_mar02.pdf](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/jerrylee/programs/fjc/paper_mar02.pdf); see also “Focus on Accountability: Best Practices for Juvenile Court and Probation,” Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants Program, August 1999, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/jaibgbulletin/exemp.html>).

## **PROJECT EXILE—RICHMOND, VIRGINIA**

In response to rising gun violence in the 1990s, Richmond implemented “Project Exile.” Project Exile specifically targeted previously convicted felons carrying guns and armed persons involved in drug or violent crimes.

The program had three major components: (1) prosecution of gun violations in federal courts where sentencing guidelines are typically tougher than state courts; (2) collaboration between state, local, and federal officers; and (3) an extensive community outreach and media campaign to educate potential offenders of the zero tolerance approach for gun crimes. Under the program, Richmond police officials worked with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to review cases involving felons with guns, drug users with guns, guns used in drug trafficking, among others, to determine if a federal statute applied and whether federal prosecution would be more appropriate.

Project advocates claimed the program resulted in a substantial decline in gun violence, but some studies dispute whether the decline was attributable to the program (see <http://www.ncjrs.gov/app/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=193978>; see also [http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun\\_violence/profile38.html](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/profile38.html).)

## **OPERATION SAFE SUMMER—CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

In the summer of 2006, a surge in violent crimes led Chicago to launch “Operation Safe Summer.” As part of the operation, the Chicago Police Department targeted certain high crime neighborhoods, defined as “Violence Zones” for special attention. It substantially increased police presence in these zones on Friday and Saturday nights during June, July, and August looking for everything from seat belt violations to guns and drugs.

The department, along with the Cook County Sheriff’s Department and the Illinois State Police, checked license plates and, after determining the status of the plates and establishing probable cause, checked cars for hidden guns and drugs.

(For information on two other Chicago programs, see OLR Report [2010-R-0341](#).)

## **ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES**

Zero tolerance law enforcement policies involve strict and aggressive enforcement of public nuisance laws and other minor crimes on the assumption that low-level crimes very often lead to more serious crimes. Public nuisance crimes include disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, public drinking, public urination, and other minor offenses that negatively impact the quality of life. The police reforms introduced in New York City in the 1990s by then police Chief William Bratton epitomizes zero tolerance policing.

While supporters associate zero tolerance policies with crime reduction, critics argue that they:

1. may have been among several factors contributing to the decline in crime, including additional police reforms and social and demographic factors;
2. “may be counterproductive in the long run if they drive already marginalized people deeper into lives of desperation and deviance”;
3. are at best temporary solutions, and long-term progress against crime and sustained reduction depend upon numerous societal changes; and
4. alienate residents from police.

Critics also cite concern over the aggressive, non-discretionary nature of policing often associated with zero tolerance, as well as its implications for police resources, court workloads, prison facilities, and police-community relations.

(For additional information, see <https://www.ncjrs.gov/appSearch/Abstracts.aspx?id=206007>.)

## **VIDEO SURVEILLANCE**

Proponents of video surveillance argue that it may deter potential offenders and criminal behavior by increasing the probability of detection and apprehension, alerting police to dangerous situations, and generating evidence to help identify suspects and witnesses. But evidence of its effectiveness is mixed and concerns about privacy infringement persist.

A 2011 study of video surveillance programs in Baltimore, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., conducted by the Urban Institute, found mixed results, with crime unchanged in some areas and falling in others. According to the study, “much of the success or failure depended on how the surveillance system was set up and monitored and how each city balanced privacy and security.” Among the study’s conclusions: “Cities and neighborhoods that saw no change in crime may not be actively monitoring their cameras or may have had too few cameras to render the system a useful crime prevention and investigation tool.”

(For more information on the study, “*Evaluating the Use of Public Surveillance Cameras for Crime Prevention—A Summary*, [Click here](#) .)

A 2008 California Research Bureau study of the effectiveness of video surveillance systems in two Los Angeles communities found that violent crimes fell in both areas, but the decline was not statistically significant. The report concluded that:

1. video surveillance is a law enforcement tool, not a panacea;
2. effective and sustainable video surveillance systems require adequate training, leadership, and resources;
3. explicit guidance on storage and use of video surveillance might help allay privacy concerns;
4. deterrence and enforcement are strongly intertwined; and
5. additional research is needed into local program operations, as well as the detection, apprehension, and prosecution of criminal suspects.

(For more information on the study, *Measuring the Effects of Video Surveillance on Crime in Los Angeles*, visit: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/08/08-007.pdf>.)

## **COMMUNITY POLICING**

As part of their law enforcement strategies, many communities nationwide, including several in Connecticut, have implemented community policing, also known as strategic policing, neighborhood-oriented policing, and problem-oriented policing.

According to a National Institute of Justice Research brief, (August, 1992), many definitions of community policing exist but they have one element in common— “a cooperative approach to working with citizens and other agencies based on the concept of shared responsibility for community security.” Community members actively participate in solving the problems plaguing the community. Community policing strategies vary depending on the communities and their needs but they share certain basic principles and considerations.

Community policing differs from traditional policing in how the community is perceived and in its expanded policing goals. While crime control and prevention remain central priorities, community policing strategies use a wide variety of methods to address these goals. The police and the community become partners in addressing problems of disorder and neglect (e.g., gang activity, abandoned cars, and broken windows) that, although perhaps not criminal, can eventually lead to serious crime. As the link between the police and the community is strengthened over time, the ensuing partnership will be better able to pinpoint and mitigate the underlying cause of crime (*Understanding Community Policing, A Framework for Action, Bureau of Justice Assistance monograph, NCJ 14847, August 1994, p. 4*).

(For more information on community policing, visit <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf>.)

## **TRAFFIC CALMING**

Traffic calming programs, including curb extensions, medians, lane narrowings, and roundabouts are designed to slow vehicles on streets. Although few studies of the relationship between traffic calming and crime prevention exist, research suggests that residents in neighborhoods with slower streets are more likely to take ownership of those streets and in so doing increase the surveillance that is key to deterring crime.

(For a description of traffic calming initiatives in Connecticut, see OLR Report [2005-R-0692](#).)

VR:ts