

Annual Report to the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners

October 2010

Introduction

In 2008, Mecklenburg County formed the Justice and Public Safety Task Force to address community concerns regarding crime and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. One of the recommendations to emerge from the Task Force was the formation of a Criminal Justice Citizen's Advisory Committee (CJAC). The primary responsibility envisioned for the CJAC was to identify and explore potential solutions for improving the criminal justice system on behalf of the community and the Board of County Commissioners.

The CJAC held its inaugural meeting in July 2009 and has been convening monthly for the past year. It is comprised of 13 members with one representative from the local bar association, the school system, the faith community, law enforcement, substance abuse services, rehabilitation, and each of the County's six districts. During meetings, committee members discussed an array of issues, interviewed guest speakers from justice agencies, and pinpointed areas of concerns. Outlined below are the key findings and observations from the CJAC, and corresponding recommendations.

Findings and Recommendations

Many of the CJAC's findings and recommendations are similar to those previously made by the Task Force. In many instances, the recommendations of the Task Force were followed through only partially or not at all. A recurring observation of our committee is that while the system is comprised of agencies sharing a common goal, the system as a whole lacks unison due to the various layers of government. Greater cooperation between agencies is essential to increase efficiency and improve public safety.

Finding #1: Part I Chronic offenders are serious issues for this community. The Task Force previously identified this concern as its third most important priority and made specific recommendations to address the problem. While significant progress (e.g., *2010 Bail Policy*, District Attorney's Office Habitual Felon Team, CMPD's Priority Offender List) has been made, there remains much to be done to reduce the level of chronic offenders and recidivism.

Recommendations

- Continue to maintain the significant improvements that have been made regarding the 2010 Bail Policy, the District Attorney's Habitual Team and CMPD's Priority Offender List.
 - Create a baseline to measure success.
- Establish county-wide criteria for priority offender(s).
 - Create a Task Force of all local law enforcement agencies, DA's Office, district and superior court judges to define criteria.
 - Generate a list of the offenders that meet the above criteria.
 - Measure and track any trends so that plans can be created to act accordingly through the County Manager's Office.

Finding #2: The need to improve informational technology has long been an issue that is essential for increased efficiency in our criminal justice system. Serious inequities exist between agencies and this hinders the system overall. While it is understood that many recommendations may be cost prohibitive, this community has to take the initiative to find creative ways to fund modern informational systems.

Recommendations

- Support the County's Criminal Justice Information Technology System Strategic Plan.
- Coordinate with other urban centers to create an information system for relevant state criminal justice agencies.
 - To the extent possible, coordinate with the State.
- Identify those areas where improvements to the record management system(s) can be made without being dependant on State resources.

Finding #3: There appears to be inconsistency in the manner crime statistics are reported which leads to a lack of public confidence in the information being provided. While there are certain standards for reporting crime statistics, it also appears that discretion is allowed to the various municipalities in our county. This discretion makes it difficult to compare crime statistics by municipality and, in some instances, from year to year which undermines public confidence in the data.

Recommendations

- Standardize the reporting of crime statistics for public knowledge to ensure consistency and accuracy among the law enforcement agencies through the County Manager's Office.
- Create a set of metrics to gather crime data from law enforcement agencies that accurately measure crime trends.
- Establish a procedure/protocol to independently audit the data.

Finding #4: There is a clear distinction between the roles of the various police departments in the county (i.e. arrests) and the District Attorney's Office (i.e. convictions); however, there needs to be improved communication and cooperation among the various police departments and the District Attorney's Office. This difference leads to dismissals, inefficient use of time and resources, and delays in case processing. The Task Force previously identified this as its second most important priority but it appears that very little has been done to improve cooperation and align priorities.

Recommendations

- Create a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that define protocol to improve efficiency from arrest to adjudication.
- Develop an effective resolution mechanism for disputes between various police departments and the District Attorney's Office.
- Improve use of judges' time, docket scheduling, and courtroom facilities.

Finding #5: There is a disconnect between the reasonable expectations of the public and the practicalities of law enforcement to properly investigate property crimes. One of the biggest complaints by the public appears to be the failure of some police departments to follow up on property crimes. To complicate the issue, there is a public perception of a lack of consistency from district to district in which property crimes receive face-to-face contact. While resources may limit the steps that can be taken by our respective police departments, an appearance of indifference undermines the public's confidence.

Recommendations

- Establish or re-evaluate a policy, to the extent practical, requiring face-to-face investigation of property crimes.
- Communicate clearly this policy to the public.
- Analyze by district face-to-face contact versus telephone contact for individuals reporting property crimes. Evaluate discrepancies between contact methods.
- Utilize Reserves, Citizens on Patrol and others available as alternative resources to perform face-to-face investigations of property crime complaints.