

## U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

### Fighting Violent Crime

After years of experiencing generally falling rates of violent crime across the country, the United States experienced a distinct uptick in certain categories of violent crime last year. California was no exception. According to a report by the California Attorney General, though our state's overall violent crime rate increased only a little from 2019 to 2020, by 0.8%, the homicide rate increased a dramatic 31% during that period, to its highest rate since 2008.

United States Attorney General Merrick B. Garland recently emphasized that the U.S. Department of Justice's highest priority is helping to ensure the safety of our communities. Accordingly, in May 2021, the Department announced a comprehensive strategy for reducing violent crime that emphasizes building community trust, investing in prevention and intervention programs, setting enforcement priorities, and measuring results.

The Eastern District of California has had much success over the years with our Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program. Together with our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, we work to identify the principal drivers of violent crime in our various cities and counties and then direct investigative and prosecutorial resources to address them. Sometimes that leads us to prosecute in federal court convicted felons with substantial criminal records for illegally possessing firearms that could be used to commit additional violent crimes. Other times we lead a coordinated federal, state, and local effort focusing enforcement resources on a particular city that is temporarily experiencing a very high rate of violent crime. For example, our office launched a joint federal-local initiative in the City of Vallejo in August 2020, Operation PEACE, to respond to the increased number of homicides and other violent crimes in Vallejo. We undertook this joint initiative with the Vallejo Police Department, the Solano County District Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and Homeland Security Investigations. In addition to these enforcement efforts, we also support and participate in prevention efforts like the City of Stockton's Ceasefire program, in which at-risk individuals are offered positive alternatives to joining gangs and engaging in criminal activity and violence. We also support and participate in reentry efforts that focus on helping offenders enter back into society after they complete their criminal sentences. While doing all of this, we make sure we reach out to the community in a variety of ways to communicate what we are doing and to gain its support for our and our law enforcement partners' efforts.

Just this month, we added a major new component to the enforcement part of our PSN program. In July, together with the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Northern District of California and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, we launched a Firearms Trafficking Strike Force to target the illegal sales of guns that are sold to criminals who use them to commit crimes in our two districts. The Attorney General selected the Sacramento Region and San Francisco Bay Area along with four other locations around the country, including New

York City, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, as Strike Force sites based on the prevalence of guns that are trafficked around the state and across state lines and then used in violent crimes. Our Strike Force will work with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to trace guns used in violent crimes back to their source and then take appropriate enforcement action. Past tracing efforts have indicated that most guns used in violent crimes in California have been trafficked within the state. A gun may change hands, for example, between individuals in Vallejo, then Oakland, then Richmond, and then Stockton before being used to commit a crime in that city. Many also are illegally trafficked into California from other states including Nevada and Arizona. For that reason, we are coordinating our efforts with the U.S. Attorney's Offices in those districts, so that a crime committed in Sacramento with a gun illegally purchased in Nevada, for example, could lead to a prosecution or other enforcement action in Nevada. Our Strike Force's strategy will include a focus on combatting the illegal trafficking of "ghost guns," privately made firearms that do not have a serial number, which many criminals prefer because they are more difficult to trace. Adding the Firearms Trafficking Strike Force to our existing PSN program will ensure that we are not just taking action against an individual who uses a gun to commit a crime, we are also focusing on whether criminal conduct led to the gun being in that individual's hands.

All these efforts can succeed only if we and our law enforcement partners have the support and trust of the community we serve. As Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco recently observed, "The Department's efforts to tackle crime depend on having trust and legitimacy with the communities we serve, so law enforcement is viewed as—and can be—an ally in guarding public safety." For that reason, my office will continue to reach out to community leaders and organizations across the district to engage in a discussion of how best to address public safety issues and to seek support for our efforts, including those directed at addressing violent crime.

If you would like to communicate with our office, please contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

Acting United States Attorney

*Phillip A. Talbert*