

2008 Mecklenburg County Justice and Public Safety Task Force Recommendations

The Mecklenburg County Justice and Public Safety Task Force was created in response to a combination of factors -including a Jail Master Plan report and public outcry for local government to do something to correct system deficiencies and an increase in crime - particularly, property crime. At its May 20, 2008 meeting, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to create the non-partisan task force to identify and recommend to the Board immediate and substantive modifications to the operations of city, county and state criminal justice agencies in Mecklenburg County to restore their functional effectiveness within the coming budget year.

Retired Chief Superior Court Judge Shirley Fulton and retired Carolinas Healthcare CEO, Dr. Harry Nuking, accepted appointments as co-chairs and an open application process provided the County Manager and Task Force Co-Chairs with more than 350 applicants to fill 12 remaining seats. With a charge of "working together to determine how to best allocate resources to make the most impact on crime and the Criminal Justice System," the Task Force met and found that Mecklenburg County citizens perceive that public safety is not considered to be a consistently high priority by elected officials of Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte or the State of North Carolina, all of which have direct responsibility for significant portions of the Criminal Justice System.

The Task Force recognizes that solutions to some of the challenges of the Criminal Justice System are limited by legislative and statutory mandates. However, the Task Force believes that it is possible to work within these constraints to improve the system. The Task Force delivered the report with the hope that the recommendations and observations included would lead to positive changes in the Criminal Justice System and reduce crime. Below is an outline of the recommendations from the report.

Recommendation 1: Establish Oversight Function

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Establish a function/position within Mecklenburg County and a permanent Citizen Advisory Committee to promote collaboration and coordination across all components of the Criminal Justice System. The function/position will be given authority to establish performance measures; will work with the Citizen Advisory Committee; will recommend funding priorities related to the Criminal Justice System to the County Manager; and will seek to increase effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System.	Responsibility of Citizen Review Board

Recommendation 2: Align Police Department/District Attorney Priorities

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Encourage the immediate creation of a formal agreement to align priorities between the Police Departments in Mecklenburg County and the District Attorney's Office.	Responsibility of Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office CMPD established the Priority Offender Strategy Team (POST) Program to focus on priority repeat offenders with the support of the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office.

Recommendation 3: Focus on Part One Chronic Offenders

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Increase focus on Part One chronic offenders by a) identifying and fast-tracking the arrest and prosecution of Part One chronic offenders and b) developing a system-wide, comprehensive plan that reduces the number of chronic offenders. Establish a separate division within the District Attorney's Office that focuses on the expedited prosecution of chronic offenders.	Responsibility of Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office, Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office, and NC Probation & Parole

Recommendation 4: Create Criminal Justice System Report

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Increase the accountability of the entire Criminal Justice System by creating one consolidated, transparent, understandable, easily accessible, broadly disseminated and regular report available to the public that communicates the effectiveness and efficiency of the Criminal Justice System. The responsibility for this reporting would fall to the position referenced in recommendation one.	Responsibility of Citizen Advisory Committee that needs to be established

Recommendation 5: Complete Information Systems Review

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Complete a comprehensive independent review of information systems used in the Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice System and produce and implement an Information System Strategic Plan for the Criminal Justice System.	Responsibility of Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office

Recommendation 6: Collaborate with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Public Schools

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Increase collaboration and resources between the Criminal Justice System, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and other public schools with a focus on prevention and offenders.	Responsibility of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. CMPD and Community Relations Committee have launched a conflict resolution program in coordination with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools for the 2019-2020 school year.

Recommendation 7: Expand Use of Specialty Courts

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Increase usage of, and provide greater support for, specialty courts.	Responsibility of Courts

Recommendation 8: Implement Alternative Solutions to Incarceration

Task Force Recommendation

Response and Actions

Implement and expedite alternative solutions to incarceration for first-time offenders.

Primary Responsibility of Mecklenburg County District Attorney’s Office.
For youth, CMPD implemented the Youth Diversion Program and REACH Out Program

Recommendation 9: Examine Staffing/Salaries

Task Force Recommendation	Response
Adjust and maintain staffing ratios and salaries for all positions within the Criminal Justice System to industry standards. Additionally, explore alternatives for how to retain employees in all areas of the Criminal Justice System.	Responsibility of agencies in the Criminal Justice System

Recommendation 10: Target Juvenile/Jail Programs

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Target and support resources to programs for juveniles and jail inmates -such as GED's, drug treatment, job training, counseling, etc. in order to prevent and reduce crime through youth intervention programs and through programs that provide jail inmates alternatives to criminal lifestyles and recidivism.	Responsibility of Mecklenburg County Sheriff’s Office. CMPD continues youth diversion work in this area.

Recommendation 11: Maximize Use of Monitoring Devices

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Fully implement and increase the efficiency of the use of monitoring devices where appropriate through the entire Criminal Justice System (i.e., courts, police, Sheriff, probation, juveniles).	CMPD has had in place electronic monitoring program in place since 2009. CMPD monitors approximately 400 persons daily and overnight employs crime scene correlation. Cannot speak for use of electronic monitoring by other agencies.

Recommendation 12: Conform To American Bar Association (ABA) Performance Standards

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Reduce the number of days it takes to process cases through the Criminal Justice System to the American Bar Association standards.	Responsibility of Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office

Recommendation 13: Increase Police Visibility

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Support full implementation of increased police visibility on the streets.	<p>One form of police visibility is achieved through walking beats. Walking beats are conducted in four primary areas including Uptown, Beatties Ford Road/Lasalle Street, NoDa, and Thomas Street. These walking beats are conducted during daylight hours and evening hours when nightlife is present.</p> <p>There are additional locations, due to their long stretches, where walking beats would not be practical including the North Tryon corridor, the Shops at University, greenways, and parks. For these locations, coverage is provided using bicycles and dual sport motorcycles.</p>

Recommendation 14: Follow-up on Property Crime

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Encourage all Police Departments within Mecklenburg County to investigate and follow-up with those individuals who experience property crimes.	CMPD officers/detectives follow up with all individuals who experience property crimes. In addition, CMPD sends an email survey to victims that provide an email address to receive feedback on the service provided.

Recommendation 15: Effectively Use Citations and Warning Tickets

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Encourage the appropriate use of citations and warning tickets to increase the efficiency of the system.	Citations are issued by CMPD when appropriate. This practice was reinstated in 2018 by the CMPD.

Recommendation 16: Increase Support to Victims

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Increase attention to victims' assistance programs and efforts.	CMPD implemented Homicide Group in 2009 providing services to secondary victims of homicides. In 2016, the Homicide Support Group was expanded and renamed the Victim Support Group to include providing services to secondary victims of traffic related deaths. In 2018, the Victim Support Group again expanded its services to provide support to secondary youth victims affected by homicide and traffic related deaths.

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2005 Homicide Task Force Recommendations

In 2005, 85 people were murdered in Charlotte-Mecklenburg—the largest number since 1995. In a community of 670,000 people that prides itself on its heart, its compassion, and its quality of life, 85 homicides are 85 too many.

As homicides in Charlotte began to increase, African Americans became disproportionately represented as both homicide victims and perpetrators. In discussions on how to address the problem, then Mayor Pro Tern Patrick Cannon, Assistant City Manager Keith Parker and Police Chief Darrel Stephens conceived the idea of a task force to examine the issue. The Task Force would be composed of representatives from many segments of the community who could examine the issue from varied perspectives and make recommendations on what the City Council and the community could do to impact the problem. Council approved the formation of the Homicide Task Force on February 28, 2005. Dianne English, Executive Director of the Community Building Initiative, agreed to chair the Task Force and worked with the City Manager's Office to identify task force members who represented critical points of view on the homicide and violent crime issue.

The task force concluded that the following list of recommendations offered a strategy to address the root causes of the problem through a balance of prevention, intervention and enforcement efforts. An important component was that the strategy articulated a role for virtually every member of the community. Task Force member Lisa Crawford reminded the group that, "we have not asked enough people to do a small thing; we have asked a few people to do a large thing." With the entire community as stakeholders in homicide reduction, we can make a difference.

Recommendation 1: Increase Community Awareness

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Develop a community education program on homicides that focuses on the magnitude and severity of the problem, dispels myths and increases awareness that everyone in the community is affected by the reality of homicide.	Chief Putney continues to address homicides in Charlotte-Mecklenburg dispelling myths and increases awareness that everyone in the community is affected by the reality of homicide.

Recommendation 2: Increase Enforcement Efforts That Target the Most Violent Offenders

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Use the Operation Cease Fire approach to target the violent gangs responsible for a significant number of serious crimes and expand the Operation Dusk to Dawn Program, a curfew for robbery offenders out on bail, to other offenses.	The CMPD implemented the Call-In Program in 2013 (same concept as Operation Cease Fire). The objective is to confront these offenders and their illegal behaviors. The offenders selected are on probation and therefore accountable to the criminal justice system. The "Call-In" program is a focused deterrence carrot-and-stick approach in which members of a criminal network — even those on the fringes who have not yet committed serious crimes — are identified and sought out by the CMPD who want them to know their actions can have unintended consequences for others in their cliques. The offenders are called in along with service providers and partners on site to discuss their options moving forward - quit offending or go to jail.

Recommendation 3: Intervene Early Through the School System

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
<p>Expand resources for the school system to conduct mental health assessments for elementary school students, ages 6-10, to detect behavioral and psychological problems at an early age; provide educators with a comprehensive resource guide on available services for children,youth and their families, and; engage in further dialogue on the role of schools and after school programs in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention in behavioral and family problems 	<p>Responsibility of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching conflict resolution skills ▪ Prevention related training-drugs, gangs, etc. ▪ Parenting education and training 	<p>Teaching conflict resolution skills – CMPD works with Community Relations Committee</p>

Recommendation 4: Expand Prevention Programs

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
<p>Continue to support and expand existing prevention programs, including the Steele Creek Youth Network, Right Moves for Youth, Gang of One and the Police Athletic League. The emphasis of these programs should be the prevention of criminal activity, including gang involvement; providing healthy alternatives to criminal activity, and building self-esteem and life skills. These programs should have a research and evaluation component to identify successful initiatives that can be replicated throughout the city. The faith community is a strong partner in the Steele Creek Youth Network and they should be encouraged to use their resources in prevention programs throughout the community.</p>	<p>The CMPD continually builds trust and legitimacy with its citizens by focusing on three primary goals Chief Kerr Putney has articulated for the CMPD including crime fighting, community engagement, and professional development. The CMPD has more than 30 CMPD youth-focused programs that proactively address community engagement and building community trust. A synopsis of these youth focused programs can be provided upon request.</p>

Recommendation 5: Expand Mentoring Programs

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
<p>Expand existing mentoring programs, including the Mayor's Mentoring Alliance, and develop new ones with an emphasis on helping young people in the African American community develop positive concepts of manhood and womanhood; develop programs that explore the concept of mentoring families.</p>	<p>Responsibility of Mayor's Office</p>

Recommendation 6: Increase Job Opportunities

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Engage in a partnership with the corporate community to expand the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program by creating a summer and after-school corporate challenge with public recognition for those corporate partners who create jobs for youth and positive publicity for success stories regarding the youth participating in the program.	Responsibility of Mayor's Office

Recommendation 7: Reduce Availability of Guns

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Lobby the State Legislature for stricter penalties for all offenses committed with a gun.	Responsibility of City Council

Recommendation 8: Invest in Problem Solving Courts

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Expand the drug court concept to develop problem solving courts such as child neglect and family courts.	Responsibility of the court system

Recommendation 9: Strengthen Police Partnership with Probation and Parole

Task Force Recommendation	Response
Strengthen the partnership between the Police Department and Probation and Parole through more joint operations and shared information systems.	Partnership between the CMPD and Probation & Parole is strong especially regarding priority offenders through the Priority Offender Strategy Team (POST) Program

Recommendation 10: Seek Additional Resources for the Criminal Justice System

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
The City, County, and community should lobby the legislature for more funding for all components of the criminal justice system.	Responsibility of City Council

Recommendation 11: Provide Enhanced Services to Families of Homicide Victims

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Provide Enhanced Services to Families of Homicide Victims	CMPD implemented Homicide Group in 2009 providing services to secondary victims of homicides.

Recommendation 12: Support and Enhance the Network of Services for Offenders Reentering Our Community

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Support and Enhance the Network of Services for Offenders Reentering Our Community	Responsibility of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

Recommendation 13: Develop a Collaborative Violence Reduction Partnership Among the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Task Force Recommendation	Response and Actions
Develop a Collaborative Violence Reduction Partnership Among the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Responsibility of the FBI-Safe Streets Task Force. CMPD continues its work with Federal partners to hold violent offenders accountable.

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