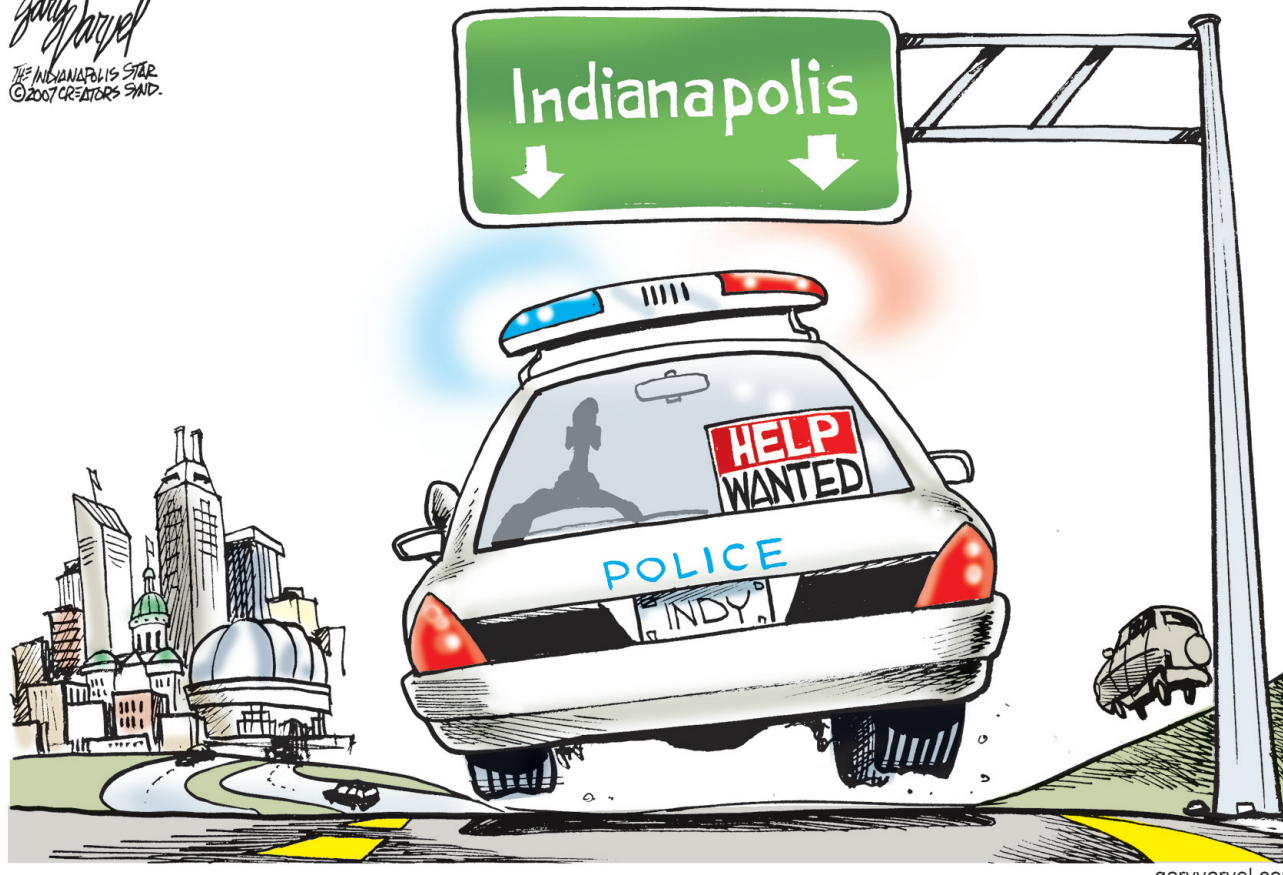


OUR VOICES

Gary Varvel
THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR
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More police would help, but it's not enough

Adding officers alone won't lower crime rates

Our position:
Adding more cops alone won't deter the city's long-term crime problem.

Last week's retaliatory shooting of two young men in the Meadows neighborhood on East 38th Street, along with the rape of a woman in a Downtown parking lot earlier this month, raises the question: Where are officers from the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department when we need them? So do crime statistics, including a 30-percent increase in robberies between 2000 and 2005.

The IMPD is facing a spate of retirements over the next three years, along with a shortage of patrol officers that, given the city's fiscal constraints, won't be easy to solve. An even tougher recruiting crisis, which also faces police departments nationwide, will come in the next decade as baby boomers begin retiring en masse.

But will fixing the manpower shortage reduce crime on its own? Not necessarily. While there is a need to resolve IMPD's short- and long-term staffing issues, the department must figure out new crime-fighting tactics and better manage its force. Meanwhile, city officials and citizens will have to address leadership and quality-of-life issues that are the underlying causes of rising crime.

Putting enough cops on the street has always been a problem in Indianapolis and Marion County, especially in townships outside the old city limits. But rising crime, along with a near-record homicide rate last year, further highlights this.

The first staffing problem facing IMPD is most immediate, with some 113 officers expected to retire by year's end and another 30 by the close of 2009. Most of them are taking advantage of a deferred-retirement option

ONLINE: CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

What are the main causes of rising crime? Add your comments online and we'll publish responses in Sunday's Voices section.

Go to www.IndyStar.com/opinion, click on the editorial headline and then post a comment at TalkBack.

partially funded by the state as part of an earlier round of pension relief. The department must fill these positions simply to remain at its current size of 1,600 officers.

Then there is the need to hire as many as 900 additional officers to adequately patrol the city, especially the townships. This is a legacy of the chronic understaffing of the Marion County Sheriff's Department before it merged with the Indianapolis Police Department to form the IMPD. City-County Council members can no longer afford to ignore calls to add more officers, made first by then-Sheriff Jack Cottey in the early 1990s and by his successor, current Sheriff Frank Anderson.

The long-term concern lies with the aging of IMPD's patrol ranks, now averaging 43. Because police pension benefits allow for officers to retire at age 50, this could become a problem in the next seven years. And IMPD won't be alone: Some 30,000 retiring officers must be replaced nationwide by 2012, along with adding 38,000 officers, according to William Woska, a professor at Golden Gate University in Carmel, Calif.

Addressing all of this won't be easy. IMPD faces stiff competition with other departments, both in Indiana cities and neighboring states, to recruit and hire officers. The department has spent some \$30,000 in the past six months on billboards, magazine supplements and even trailers in movie theaters to attract officers, according to recruiting supervisor Sgt. Daniel Kelly.

The fact that it takes IMPD as long as nine months to field a police academy class — versus the three to four months of most law en-

forcement agencies — exacerbates the problem. While IMPD expects to recruit 100 officers this year, training may not begin until next year.

A longer-term issue relates to the city's under-funded pre-1977 pensions. Those benefits are already pulling a quarter of the public safety budget and continue to grow, crowding out funding for new cops.

Sheriff Anderson and city officials, including Mayor Bart Peterson, will need to find new funding sources. Proposals at the Statehouse to allow taxing alternatives for cities, including Indianapolis, can help, but won't be enough. IMPD must also streamline its recruiting process in order to more quickly hire officers.

Adding staff alone isn't going to lower crime rates. Consultants John Campbell, Joseph Brann and David Williams in a 2004 study note that cities such as San Diego, with lower levels of staffing, did as well controlling crime as highly staffed locales such as New York. Indianapolis must look at other ways as well.

One is to address how manpower is deployed, an issue that predates IMPD's existence. The Marion County sheriff, for example, used just 17 percent of his officers to patrol neighborhoods in 2000, according to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, far below the percentage devoted to patrolling by either IPD or by smaller sheriffs' agencies in Allen and Lake counties. Today, only 46 percent of the 72 officers patrolling Downtown actually walk the beat, with some additional officers helping out.

Another potential improvement lies with policing techniques. Community policing was once a hallmark of the old IPD, but was difficult for sheriff's deputies to do because of low staffing numbers. IMPD should put even more emphasis on building community relations as it adds more officers.

Finally, city officials and citizens must address quality-of-life issues such as vandalism, vagrancy and homelessness, all of which contribute to the "broken windows" that breed criminal activity.

Adding officers to IMPD must be done. But it's only part of the solution to the city's crime problems.

EXPRESSO

A quick shot of opinion from The Star Editorial Board and local columnists

Tale of two trends

The juvenile justice system, both in Indiana and nationwide, offers a tale of two trends. One is heartening while the other is just plain shameful.

On one hand, the Indiana House made a rare move that could improve the lives of young Hoosiers who land in the system, 40 percent of whom go through court procedures without attorneys. It passed state Rep. Charlie Brown's House Bill 1339 that



Biddle

makes inadmissible statements by jailed juveniles to probation officers in all except homicide proceedings. This helps level what is now the

court's stacked deck against these children.

Another move, to switch control of Marion County's juvenile jail from sole oversight by the juvenile court judge to the Superior Court's executive committee, could help avoid past mismanagement. Transparency could stem the possibility of abuse.

On the other hand, juveniles accused of crimes in the Lake County system are displayed prominently on "Juvies," the MTV primetime show. While it may help Judge Mary Bonaventura shop her services to syndicated television, it's questionable whether it will improve the lives of children in the system. In fact, it promotes labeling them as throwaways.

Some argue that the show can help steer other youths from criminality by displaying the consequences of their actions. But many juveniles aren't in jail for stealing cars or robbing convenience stores. More often are there after getting into schoolyard fights that led to no injuries, or, in a well-publicized case in Indianapolis, for putting ice through the open window of a teacher's car. Such incidents once would have been dealt with by principals and parents.

It would be best if the state put an end to participation in shows such as "Juvies." By doing so, it will show how juvenile offenders can be rehabilitated, not exploited.

— Rishawn Biddle

Good PR

What Indianapolis really needs right now is a great advertising campaign to lure residents into its favorite neighborhoods. Estridge home builders took the names of Indianapolis communities, such as Irvington and Lockerbie, and now markets these "collections" in areas outside Marion County. Have you seen those commercials? The old neighborhoods must have some cachet.



Murphy

Sure, Indianapolis has suffered recent, uh, setbacks. But those are just mere image problems. A good PR professional surely could come up with slogans and material that will capture the Indianapolis that some people still love. Meanwhile, Warren Township schools did hire a public relations firm. The district's in hot water for an incident that occurred last December in which two sixth-graders had sex in a class. (I wasn't sure I was reading this story right the first time I saw it.) A substitute teacher was present — or apparently not — that day. Parents should insist that school officials guarantee this will never happen again.

— Beth Murphy

Go to IndyStar.com/opinion to read the Expresso blog.

KUDOS



Owen

Jane Blaffer Owen, 91, last week received a coveted Sachem award from Gov. Mitch Daniels for her tireless efforts and generous expenditures in restoring the historic village of New Harmony in southern Indiana.

OUTRAGE

Indianapolis Public Schools over-charged students for textbooks last year, made getting refunds difficult, and spent student fees for unapproved expenditures for administrators and teachers, according to a state audit.

NIGHTLINES

Jay Leno: People in Washington are now calling for Attorney General Alberto Gonzales to resign. To give you an idea how much trouble he is in, the White House is thinking of replacing him with Scooter Libby.

◆ I guess you heard, today was a big day for the U.S. Border Patrol. They caught 500 immigrants trying to sneak into the country and 200 Halliburton executives trying to sneak out.

Conan O'Brien: The California legislature announced that they have moved their state presidential primary from June to February. When asked why, the California lawmakers said because it's really fun to hear Gov. Schwarzenegger say "February."

◆ President Bush returned from a weeklong trip through Latin America. When asked about it, Bush said, "Actually, I went to Latin America, Latin Mexico, and Latin Guatemala."

Jimmy Kimmel: Outrage today, for many Americans, especially the gay ones, over comments made by Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said that he believes homosexuality is immoral. Today, the general's publisher said that he is entering rehab and will be back to work on the set of "Grey's Anatomy" in a couple of weeks.

David Letterman: It was so warm today, that Angelina Jolie adopted Ben & Jerry.



40

Percentage of inmates released from Indiana prisons who wind up back behind bars within three years. That's about 6,800 of the more than 17,000 inmates expected to be released in the state this year. A new program at the Plainfield Re-Entry Educational Facility is training felons in job and life skills that will help them stay out of trouble. Since January 2006, 88 have been released, with none returning to prison.

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