

October 5, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: MAYOR JOHN DOE
City of Fresno Mayor

FROM: CHIEF DIANA TRUEBA VEGA
Chief, Fresno Police Department

SUBJECT: Crime Dynamics

Community crime trends do not exist in a vacuum. Crime trends are part of a larger process and system, and they are influenced by a large variety of situations and societal factors. As I look back at the crime trends in the City of Fresno, I also look at other major cities within the nation that have experienced similar crime trends that the City of Fresno has experienced in the last several decades.

Historically, crime trends throughout the nation between the period of 1960 and 1980 increased exponentially. The murder rate within the above period doubled in the United States. The murder rate at the end of this period was at its highest point in 1991. Other violent crimes also increased drastically during this noted period. However, what goes up must come down. A large crime drop occurred throughout the nation. The overall crime drop phenomenon evidenced throughout major metropolitan cities within the nation has been so prevalent, it has even been given a name. Researchers for the Brennan Center called the crime drop the "*Great Crime Drop or Decline*." Just like the increase in crime included violent and property crimes so did the crime decline.

The crime decline lasted for a long time. In the City of Fresno, the Great Crime Decline was noted from 1995 to 2005. The City of Fresno had a large decrease in crime from the period of 1995 to 2005. The decrease included all major crime categories, including felonies, murder, rape, robbery, assault, misdemeanor, and drug crimes. The decrease occurred even though Fresno has been cited for having the fastest-growing youth population in California. Historically, a large youth population has been known to contribute to a large majority of violent crime. Fresno followed the downward trend of other large metropolitan cities, including New York and Los Angeles, during the "*Great Crime Drop*."

In 1995, the City of Fresno reported 4,242 felonies, 933 violent crimes, 25 murders, 21.5 rapes, 357.7 robberies, 529.4 assaults, 2425.8 property crimes, 366.6 drug crimes, and 8087 misdemeanor crimes. Fast forward to 2005, the City of Fresno reported 1805 felonies, 430.9 violent crimes, 3.1 murders, 3.1 rapes, 157.7 robberies, 267 assaults, 757.3 property crimes, 153 drug crimes, and 5411.8 misdemeanors. When the crime numbers from 1995 and 2005 are compared, the contrast is amazing. From 1995 to 2005, there was a 57.4% decrease in felonies, a decrease of 53.8% in violent crimes, a decrease in 87.5% in murder, a decrease in 85.4% in rapes, a decrease in 55.9% in robberies, a decrease in 49.6% in assaults, a decrease in 69.1% in property crimes, a decrease in 58.3% in drug crimes, and a decrease in 33.1% in misdemeanor crimes. All of the reported crime categories reported a significant decrease in crime trends.

Although the crime rates for murder and rape increased slightly between 2002 and 2005, the numbers had an overall decline for the overall period between 1995 and 2005. The book *The Great American Decline* by F. Zimring mentions there are several factors that can help explain the lowering crime rates in American cities throughout the *Great Crime Drop*. Zimring cites the following factors as playing a role in decreasing crime rates during the *Great Crime Drop*: criminal justice efficacy, demographics, and economic factors. The City of Fresno utilized highly proactive units, including the Violent Crime Suppression Unit, in the 1990s. The unit was made up of SWAT personnel, and they were responsible for responding to identified hot spots and high crime areas to help the decrease in crime. The proactive units might be part of the reason for the crime decline in Fresno. The City of Fresno is the fifth most populated city in the state of California. It is largely made up of minorities, including 49.4% Hispanics, 27.1% White, and 13.1% Asian population. The median household income in Fresno is estimated at \$47,000, and 26.9% of Fresno residents live in poverty.

With the above factors listed for the City of Fresno, including a large youth population, a large number of minorities, and a large number of Fresno residents living in poverty, it is unknown why the crime rates from 1995 to 2005 decreased so drastically.

The downward trend continued for about ten years. However, in 2015, the crime rate started to increase again. The crime changes in 2015 were not as dramatic as the change experienced in the period of 1995 to 2005. However, the crime change was notable. The overall crime rate in 2015 increased by 18.76%, and it increased again by 10.82% in 2016. The majority of the crime increase was noted in violent crimes. The violent crime for 2015 increased 18.76% in 2015. The violent crime increases of 2015 coincide with Proposition 47, which reclassified a lot of crimes from Felonies to Misdemeanors in the State of California. The make-up of Fresno's population has not changed much since the 1990s. A large majority of the population remains as minorities, and it continues to be an underserved community, with many of its citizens living in poverty.

In March 2020, the Coronavirus or Covid-19 was declared a pandemic. In the time period of March 16 to April 21, 2020, many states instituted stay at home orders and restrictions to keep residents at home in hopes of slowing the spread of Covid-19. Thirty cities in the United States reported a violent crime decrease during this identified 28-day period compared to the same time frame in 2019. Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City were some of the cities that reported a crime decrease during these 28 days.

However, not all cities reported a crime decrease. Twelve of the thirty cities reported a violent crime increase. Denver, Houston, and Irving, Texas, were some of the cities that reported an increase in violent crime. The City of Fresno followed suit in the increase of violent crime. In April 2020, the Fresno Police Department saw an increase of 30 shootings from April 2019. There was also an increase in commercial burglaries since businesses were closed and not occupied. The city of Fresno did experience a decrease of 60% of traffic tickets since fewer people were out on the road.

One of the reasons that could explain the increase of violent crime in the City of Fresno could be the Zero Bail policy. The policy was created and implemented by California Governor Newsom to decrease the risk of spreading Covid-19 inside California jails. The Zero Bail policy minimized the populations of California jails. However, many law enforcement agencies have opposed the Zero Bail policy, saying the policy is a danger to law-abiding citizens because it creates a revolving door for people committing crimes. Sheriff Mimms cited she her agency has released 1,060 inmates and has re-arrested 184 of them since the No Bail Policy was implemented. In one particular case, one Fresno man was arrested and released six times in a short period of six weeks due to the Zero Bail Policy. Some of the crimes the man was arrested and released on were drug charges, driving on a suspended license, and evading police.

Crime trends in the City of Fresno from the period of 1995 to 2005 showed a drastic increase in crimes. While the decrease was sharp, it eventually started to level out and even slightly increase in 2015. So far, the year 2020 has also shown an increase in crime due to Covid-19 and possibly explained by the Zero Bail policy, along with the high number of youth residents and a high level of poverty. While it is too early to tell what the end of the year has in store for the crime rate in 2020, it is safe to say that what goes up must come down, and the crime rate in the City of Fresno will eventually level off and decrease.

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