

Violent crime is literally killing Shreveport and its citizens. State, parish, and city elected officials, the business community, criminal justice professionals, colleges and universities, churches and other places of worship, the media, and our citizens all have a part to play and must work as a team if we expect to reduce violent crime.

I. **Law enforcement**, of course, has a huge role to play. Some say we are the most important players in the game, maybe even the quarterback. But just as the quarterback can't win without blockers, runners, and receivers, law enforcement can't reduce violence alone. We in law enforcement must work harder than ever before, developing new crime fighting strategies, preventing, responding to, and investigating crime. We must work longer hours and demand more of ourselves. We must collect more evidence and write better reports. We must understand most people support us but there are valid reasons some don't. We need to be a positive presence in the community. We must be aggressive, yet compassionate. We must work together, and we must work smarter.

II. The **Governor and the Louisiana Legislature** also need to recognize their tremendous responsibility to the team. The Justice Reinvestment Act of 2017 reduced sentences and allowed for the early release of many violent offenders and persons charged with illegally possessing guns. Many of these violent criminals have re-offended since being released early. There is sound evidence to show violent crime has dramatically increased since the implementation of the Justice Reinvestment Act of 2017. This act was meant to lower inmate numbers while reducing crime and saving millions of dollars to fund inmate rehabilitation programs. Did this act hurt more than it helped? We need an impartial and critical study of the effects of the act, the cost savings, and the repercussions of the early release of violent felons. If any money was saved, where has it gone? Once this impartial review is completed, we need legislation to fix the problems.

The Governor and Legislature also need to take a critical look into the confusing and complex sentencing laws of Louisiana and realize that our sentencing laws are far from understandable and far from what would be considered "truth in sentencing." Violent crime is one of the most pressing and important issues facing Louisiana. We as citizens deserve to know what our state elected officials have done to address violent crime. Just as law enforcement is held accountable, so should our state and local elected officials.

III. The **District Attorney and District Judges** are also critical team players and crucial to whether we win or lose this game. To reduce violent crime, persons illegally possessing guns must always be held accountable. This is a well-accepted axiom among criminal justice professionals in many jurisdictions. Often violent criminals have a history of illegally possessing guns, but the charges were dismissed or reduced. This practice must stop. Illegally possessing guns must always be taken seriously with the understanding that it is a precursor to violence. Criminals fear being prosecuted for illegal gun possession in federal court, not so much in state court. We must change the criminal's mindset that felons, domestic abusers, and drug dealers can possess guns even though forbidden by law. Reducing violence on our streets must include aggressive prosecution and sentencing similar to the prosecution and sentencing in the federal courts.

IV. The **Mayor and the Shreveport City Council** could more aggressively attack the conditions that encourage crime in our neighborhoods. Blight in Shreveport is the worst I have seen in all my 47 years of patrolling the neighborhoods of Shreveport. It is incredibly sad that some citizens must live in horrible neighborhood conditions with rats in their homes while witnessing shootings in their streets and bullets coming through their walls. It is true that blight and trash promote illegal activity. The “broken windows” concept is a proven theory. It simply cannot be denied. If you doubt it, overlay a blight map and a violent crime map. They are virtually the same area. The elected city officials could prioritize clearing and cleaning and concentrate efforts on restoring a sense of order and peace to these neighborhoods. Another obligation of city leaders is the important task of supporting law enforcement with adequate funding and moral support. Hold law enforcement accountable for its behavior when bad but also recognize the good. City leaders can utilize their power as elected officials to help get state laws changed that will hold violent criminals and persons illegally possessing guns more accountable. They should research and consider any city ordinances that would restore order, peace, and a positive quality of life in Shreveport.

V. The **Caddo Parish Commission** must do their part and provide more housing for violent juvenile offenders. Seventeen-year-old violent offenders are now considered juveniles, according to state law, creating a huge problem for the juvenile detention center. There simply are no cells to hold violent juvenile offenders and they are released back into the community. The Commission should set an example by encouraging and supporting law enforcement. The Commission should use their power to help get state laws changed that hold violent criminals and those illegally possessing firearms more accountable.

VI. The **Caddo Parish School Board** has an important position to play. Many say boredom leads our young citizens to criminal behavior. What about after-school recreation programs or opening gyms in the evening and on weekends? Staff them with teachers and coaches to supervise, tutor, and coach our kids when parents are absent, unable, or unwilling. The elected school board representatives can help encourage action by state and local elected officials to do whatever is necessary to address violent crime. All elected officials have a position on the team and must do their part.

VII. **Neighborhood residents and neighborhood associations** should demand elected officials address quality of life issues, such as blight and street lighting. They should help clean up their neighborhoods but also report conditions and people causing disturbances. They should install cameras when practical and always lock their cars. They should encourage and talk to law enforcement. They must hold their elected leaders accountable for essential services including addressing violent crime. Ask hard questions about quality of life and violent crime, let your voice be heard and then vote wiser if things don't change.

VIII. **Faith leaders**, keep praying and asking for God's guidance. Churches and other places of worship, get your congregations involved. Educate your congregations about the issues. Coordinate with other places of worship to do neighborhood prayer walks. Volunteer to help clean up neighborhoods. Open your buildings to minister to and mentor our kids when the parents can't or won't. Use your collective

voices to ask questions from elected leaders about violent crime and your safety and what can be done. Vote wisely.

IX. **Businesses and business organizations** are invaluable in holding elected officials at all levels accountable. Ask hard questions and demand answers about violent crime, prosecution, and sentencing. Use your resources to fact check the answers. Suggest alternative plans to elected officials. Demand things of law enforcement and also support them with encouragement and needed equipment. Support elected officials that agree to work on reducing violent crime and campaign against those who don't. Install cameras and make your businesses harder "targets" for crime.

X. We have some excellent **colleges and universities** in our area. Some offer degrees in the study of Criminal Justice. They have great resources and talented researchers who could help us study the root causes of crime in our community, the type of offenses, etc. They can play a very important role helping us figure out more about how we got into this tragic situation and possibly how to get out of it. These are perfect venues to research arrest rates, prosecution practices, and sentencing problems.

XI. The **media** can help by researching, investigating, and reporting more than the violent act but the underlying factors. Research the offender's background. Report facts about criminal backgrounds and previous prosecutions and sentences. Encourage law enforcement while still reporting on deficiencies and misconduct. Understand law enforcement isn't the only member on the team, ask elected officials what exactly they have done to reduce violent crime and report the answers.

It's time for each of us to work harder, demand more, vote wiser, or else find a good realtor.

Steve Prator,  
Caddo Parish Sheriff