



Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker applauds significant reduction in violent crime in Southern Illinois

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EAST ST. LOUIS, IL – One year ago, the U.S. Attorney’s Office joined with its federal, state, and local law enforcement partners to implement Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) in East St. Louis, Illinois. The centerpiece of the Department of Justice’s violent crime strategy, PSN is a nationwide initiative that brings together federal, state, and local law enforcement officials, along with community leaders, to identify the most pressing violent crime problems and to develop comprehensive solutions to address them.

According to numerous reports, since 2015, East St. Louis has had among the top per capita murder rates in the country. According to an analysis by the city of East St. Louis, from Dec. 4, 2016 to Dec. 4, 2017 there were 36 homicides in East St. Louis. Exactly one year after the implementation of PSN on Dec. 4, 2017, that number was reduced to 21 homicides. That represents a 42 percent decrease in homicides.

“PSN is about empowering people in their communities,” said Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker. “Rather than having Washington, D.C. dictate a uniform approach, PSN directs our U.S. Attorneys to work with their communities to develop a customized crime reduction plan to target the most violent criminals in the most violent areas, and to prevent and deter violent crimes before they happen. That is what we have done in East St. Louis—and it is working. In this city, where murder and violent crime rates are some of the highest in the country, crime is going down and public confidence is going up. I want to thank U.S. Attorney Weinhoeft, all of our prosecutors and federal officers and especially our state, local, and community partners. Their hard work is achieving incredible results that we want to replicate across America.”

The United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, Steven D. Weinhoeft, joined St. Clair County State’s Attorney Brendan Kelly, Illinois State Police Director

Leo Schmitz, East St. Louis Police Chief Jerry Simon, and United States Marshal Brad Maxwell, along with representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), in announcing the development.

US Attorney Weinhoeft said, “One year ago, the city of East St. Louis experienced the highest per capita murder rate in America, for the third straight year. Today, on the one-year anniversary of the local implementation of the Project Safe Neighborhoods strategy, I’m happy to report that the homicide rate has been cut by 42 percent. There is still much to do. But, today, we can be very proud of the progress that has been made.”

PSN is built on three foundational principles. First, it is community based. The initiative recognizes that different communities have different dynamics. As such, each US Attorney is tasked with tailoring a strategy that makes sense for that particular district. Second, PSN is a targeted program that uses law enforcement and community resources to identify the most violent offenders for criminal enforcement. This second principle recognizes that the majority of violent crimes are perpetrated by a small number of persistent violent offenders. Third, the program is comprehensive. It seeks to sustain relationships between local, state, and federal law enforcement, together with community groups, and with a focus on prevention and reentry strategies to disrupt the cycle of violence.

The US Attorney’s primary local PSN strategy has focused on leading bi-weekly case reviews at the East St. Louis police department with the law enforcement personnel who directly investigate violent crime cases. At those meetings, state, local, and federal law enforcement officials review every shooting incident and prioritize resources to focus on cases against the most persistent, repeat, violent offenders. State and federal prosecutors participate in the case reviews to help guide the investigations.

The Illinois State Police has supported law enforcement efforts for decades in the East St. Louis and Metro East areas. Over the past year, however, they have significantly increased their commitment by supporting the PSN initiative. The Illinois State Police has committed additional manpower to conduct proactive patrols, and they send crime scene investigators to process any scene involving a gun crime, whether or not the crime results in a fatality. This is a significant commitment considering East St. Louis receives roughly 1,300 calls each year for shots fired.

St. Clair County State’s Attorney Brendan Kelly said, “This is the kind of effort, with all the key agencies, consistently involved, that must be sustained over the long term if we are going to continue to move in the right direction. Law enforcement helps set the table for economic development by other parts of the community.”

East St. Louis Police Chief Jerry Simon said, “I appreciate the support of the US Attorney’s Office and the St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office, as well as the support of each of the law enforcement agencies. This work is directly responsible for the decrease in the overall crime rate and for the significant reduction in the homicide rate. I look forward to continuing these relationships in the future.”

US Attorney Weinhoeft said, “The challenges we face are great, but our resolve to meet those challenges is greater. One neighborhood at a time, and one shooter at a time, we are making the community safer. Today, that impact is most dramatically demonstrated by the 42% reduction in the homicide rate.”