
Kansas City, Missouri Commission on Violent Crime Executive Summary

Kansas City has experienced the ebb and flow of social instability, sustained by the ravages of poverty, violence, and substance abuse, for many years. Issues plaguing not only the city's neighborhoods, but also stealthily eroding the values of surrounding areas, negatively marking the city as an area to be avoided by businesses, job transferees, and potential homeowners.

However, the solution for Kansas City is found in a combination of policies, collective attention and changing individual decision-making.

The Commission on Violent Crime determined that the causes of homicide in Kansas City are the result of a confluence of housing, employment, and education policies dating back several generations. These policies have concentrated poverty and led to successively fewer assets and opportunities for advancement in the same geographic area that has historically been plagued by the greatest homicide rates. This confluence of community detriments is found primarily in the 64127 zip code.

To forge a Kansas City environment less hospitable for violence, the Commission, after expending more than 1,100 person-hours, proposes immediate adoption of ten key recommendations*:

1. Critical Incident Review by the Kansas City Police Department. This recommendation would further current Crime Statistics Review (C-STAR) approaches and provide more effective analysis of the circumstances in the lives of each homicide victim.
2. The Kansas City Police Department has already begun to give attention to the many aggravated assaults that could have become homicide statistics. The police department is urged to continue giving these crimes high priority, as well as evaluate the feasibility of expanding the number of personnel assigned to the Homicide Unit.
3. Attention to neighborhoods affected by crime. The "Broken Window" theory teaches that the deterioration of an environment foreshadows the deterioration of a neighborhood. Littering, noise pollution, unusable sidewalks (or sidewalks that were never provided), illegal dumping, and abandoned housing make the environment conducive to ignoring more serious symbolic and actual assaults.
4. Real, effective, personal conflict/dispute resolution that targets disputes before they escalate into more serious vendettas. Such mediation/resolution needs to be quickly assembled and offered, without being triggered by a referral from the police.
5. Helping schools produce educated, ready-to-succeed adults. Community-based solutions will need to be created to address quality afterschool programming, truancy and provide alternatives to out on-the-street suspensions. Additionally, a parent and/or guardian support group needs to be created to enable greater accountability for their children.

6. Although the Commission's work revealed that youth, under the age of 16, are responsible for only a small percentage of homicides, as one commission member stated, "It's for sure that all homicide suspects and victims were once this age." Effective youth programming requires use of evidence based, culturally-appropriate interventions which are monitored for effectiveness, and a "Youth Master Plan" that involves youth in creating attractive alternatives.
7. There also needs to be more support of legislation directed towards eradicating predatory lending; creating standards and policies for landlords; and regulating gun acquisitions from pawn shops.
8. Creation of a centralized detention and treatment system to serve Jackson County. Regional solutions to corrections can, in addition to freeing up resources in every jurisdiction within Jackson County, provide on-site substance abuse treatment and adequate space for completion of sentences, thus providing more incentive for crime reduction.
9. At least .5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) of a staff person should be identified whose responsibility will be coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating crime prevention efforts.
10. Institutionalize a group such as the Commission on Violent Crime and Prevention, with a separate mission from existing efforts such as the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime/MoveUP, Crime Commission, and Safe City. The purpose of this group will be to provide an annual review of crime, prevention, and the reaction to crime when it appears to escalate; to give continued attention to the factors that make homicide likely; and reduce it as a solution.

**Some may already be embraced by the agencies responsible for their implementation.*

Although the barriers of apathy, complacency, and communal depression surely exist, Kansas City is the "City of Fountains," and it is hoped that through these recommendations, it can flourish once again, abating the stigma as the Midwestern center of violence, poverty, and substance abuse. Kansas City remains, nonetheless, at the cutting edge of medical research and treatment, HIV/AIDS prevention and care, and police/fire protection. That same pioneering spirit can spur the resolution of the historic civic ailments embedded in this metropolitan area.