

## Annual Report to the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners

February 2011

### Introduction

In 2008, Mecklenburg County formed the Justice and Public Safety Task Force to address community concerns regarding crime and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. One of the recommendations to emerge from the Task Force was the formation of a Criminal Justice Citizen's Advisory Committee (CJAC). The primary responsibility envisioned for the CJAC was to identify and explore potential solutions for improving the criminal justice system on behalf of the community and the Board of County Commissioners.

The CJAC held its inaugural meeting in July 2009 and has been convening monthly since then. It is comprised of 13 members with one representative from the local bar association, the school system, the faith community, law enforcement, substance abuse services, rehabilitation, and each of the County's six districts. During meetings, committee members discussed an array of issues, interviewed guest speakers from justice agencies, and pinpointed areas of concerns. Outlined below are the key findings and observations from the CJAC, and corresponding recommendations.

### CJAC Members

Mark Sumwalt

*Chairperson*

Alan Adler

*District 1*

James C. Henry

*District 2*

Dennis T. Brown

*District 3*

Sean Mulhall

*District 5*

E. Thomas Bowers

*District 6*

Anthony Scheer

*Bar Association*

Carolyn Logan

*Law Enforcement*

Myra Byrum

*Rehabilitation*

Karen Worrell

*Substance Abuse Professional*

### Findings and Recommendations

Many of the CJAC's findings and recommendations are similar to those previously made by the Task Force. In many instances, the recommendations of the Task Force were followed through only partially or not at all. A recurring observation of our committee is that while the system is comprised of agencies sharing a common goal, the system as a whole lacks unison due to the various layers of government. Greater cooperation between agencies is essential to increase efficiency and improve public safety.

**Finding #1:** Part I chronic offenders are serious issues for this community. The Task Force previously identified this concern as its third most important priority and made specific recommendations to address the problem. While significant progress (e.g., *2010 Bail Policy*, District Attorney's Office Habitual Felon Team, CMPD's Priority Offender List) has been made, there remains much to be done to reduce the level of chronic offenders and recidivism.

### Recommendations

- Continue to maintain the significant improvements that have been made regarding the 2010 Bail Policy, the District Attorney's Habitual Team and CMPD's Priority Offender List.
  - Create a baseline to measure success.
- Establish county-wide criteria for priority offender(s).
  - Create a Task Force of all local law enforcement agencies, DA's Office, district and superior court judges to define criteria.
  - Generate a list of the offenders that meet the above criteria.
  - Measure and track any trends so that plans can be created to act accordingly through the County Manager's Office.

**Finding #2:** The need to improve informational technology has long been an issue that is essential for increased efficiency in our criminal justice system. Serious inequities exist between agencies and this hinders the system overall. While it is understood that many recommendations may be cost prohibitive, this community has to take the initiative to find creative ways to fund modern informational systems.

### Recommendations

- Support the County's Criminal Justice Information Technology System Strategic Plan.
- Coordinate with other urban centers to create an information system for relevant state criminal justice agencies.
  - To the extent possible, coordinate with the State.
- Identify those areas where improvements to the record management system(s) can be made without being dependant on State resources.
- Improve use of judges' time, docket scheduling, and courtroom facilities.

**Finding #3:** There seems to be a lack of public understanding in the interpretation of reported crime statistics. This and other factors have led to reduced public confidence in the information being provided. The *appearance* of accuracy and fairness in reporting of crime statistics is very important as it impacts public confidence. Law enforcement agencies should work to create transparency and promote programs and policies which insure that the data is beyond reproach.

### Recommendations

- Communicate and educate the public as to the overall objectivity of the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) crime data being collected and reported to build public confidence in reporting crime.
- Publish state and federal audit results of the reported crime statistics.

**Finding #4:** There is a clear distinction between the roles of the various police departments in the county and the District Attorney's Office. While police departments arrest based on probable cause, the District Attorney's Office prosecutes based on reasonable probability of conviction (i.e., beyond a reasonable doubt.) This natural distinction can be managed to improve communication and cooperation which will lead to more efficient use of time and resources and timely case processing. The Task Force previously identified this as its second most important priority but it appears that more can be done to improve cooperation and align priorities.

**Recommendations**

- Continue to improve the communication and cooperation between District Attorney's Office and law enforcement.
- Create a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that define protocol to improve efficiency from arrest to adjudication.
- Develop an effective resolution mechanism for disputes between various police departments and the District Attorney's Office.

**Finding #5:** To address the current public perception of inconsistencies in the investigation and reporting of property crimes, more needs to be done to educate the public regarding the current or revised policies of the various police departments concerning the handling of property crimes.

**Recommendations**

- Communicate clearly the current policy to the public.
- Utilize Reserves, Citizens on Patrol and others available as alternative resources to perform face-to-face investigations of property crime complaints.
- Encourage feedback from the community to evaluate and improve the service provided (i.e., automated telephone survey.)