Is Erie a Safe City?
Perception,
Reality,
Recommendations.

Introduction
The Jefferson Essays

Erwin Edman, writing with admiration about Emerson's essays stated "the essay has almost vanished from the world of modern writing and it is now hard to realize what a power it was..." He defined the essay as "an adventure in ideas, an explanation of a theme, which was not a complete evaluation but, was a form of literature where the part covers more than the whole..." Webster defined the essay as "a short literary composition on a particular theme or subject... generally analytic, speculative or interpretative ... an open reflection more than a treatise or thesis ... it is essentially explanatory in content."

Perhaps, the most significant essay in American History was Thomas Paine's celebrated *Common Sense*, written in 1773, that convinced many ordinary Americans of the need for independence from English rule. Only 48 pages long, it argued for American independence in clear, simple, forceful language. It became an immediate sensation and has had the largest circulation of any book published in American history.

Common Sense was an example of what is called a expository essay. Expository essays usually share a common thread – they are short (30-50 pages), utilize facts primarily to support a position, and may or may not offer contrary opinions.

The limitation of the essay permits presentation of

only the most significant information rather than the extensive information available in books or traditional reports.

The Jefferson Essays are intended to be a variation of the expository essay utilizing an easy-to-read literary style, designed to reach a large and varied public audience, on subjects important to promoting civic growth and improvements. However, reflecting the scholarly requirements of a think-tank, The Jefferson Essays must also incorporate accurate, pertinent research and even opposing views that are important in understanding the essay's most significant conclusions and recommendations.

Hopefully, The Jefferson Essays, like *Common Sense*, will be received with civic approval, stimulating community conversation and propelling Erie County towards a more productive future.

THE JEFFERSON ESSAYS
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Preface

A recurring theme: "gun violence erupts on the streets of Erie" is a cry we have repeatedly heard this past year. Mention violent crime to an Erie-area resident, and you'll likely hear "What is all of this gun shooting about? And quickly the conversation conveys the belief that the city is becoming an increasingly unpredictable and dangerous place to live.

Yet rarely, if ever, is this conclusion based on first-hand experience. Instead, those discussing the latest shootings parrot the rhetoric of local media coverage, spreading a picture of Erie as unsafe, a supposition that is generally untrue. In reality Erie is one of the safest communities in the United States. For as this essay will demonstrate, violent crime in Erie has significantly declined. Most violent crime, because of its geographically concentrated nature, affects an extremely small percentage of the community. In addition, **Erie's violent crime rate when compared to similar sized cities in Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio is the lowest, a fact that is little known.**

Therefore this essay establishes relevant facts, analyzes the recent pattern of violent crime, suggests possible causes and outlines potential solutions for keeping Erie not only the safest city in our comparative grouping but also making it one of the **nation's safest communities**.

This analysis utilizes City of Erie statistics only, and does not incorporate SMSA statistics which incorporates all of Erie County.

Statistically Speaking

Each year the FBI publishes a comprehensive study titled the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) compiled from data from police agencies around the country.

The UCR:

...compiles data from monthly law enforcement reports or individual crime incident records... [and] thoroughly examines each report it receives for reasonableness, accuracy, and deviations that may indicate errors... permit[ing] studies among neighboring jurisdictions and among those with similar populations and other common characteristics.

Chart I: UCR and EPD Murder Statistics

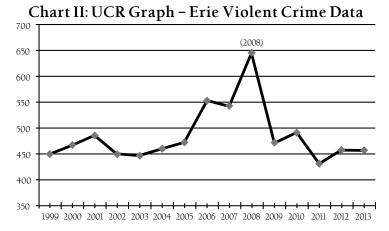|	UCR	EPD	
2014	Unavailable	11	
2013	3	5	
2012	8	9	43
2011	6	6	
2010	12	12	
2009	4	4	
2008	7 (?)	4	
2007	3	4	21
2006	2	2	
2005	6	6	
2004	1	1	

While many see murder rates as a good indicator of a city's safety, the number of homicides in a community can be misleading if they are inconsistent with a city's overall violent crime rate which incorporates **rape, robbery, and aggravated assault incidents**. In Chart I the column UCR provides

statistics on violent crime categories. The column EPD notes only homicides.

A look at Chart I, UCR and EPD Homicides, reveals **a disconnect between the number of murders over the last decade and the city's violent crime rate**. The murders committed between 2010 and 2014 total **43** according to EPD statistics, reaching high points in 2010 with **12 homicides and 2014 with 11**, an average of **8.3** for the period, compared to just **21** murders for 2005-2009 or **3.3 homicides** over those five years.

This doubling of homicides in the last five years is certainly a matter of concern and should be addressed, but it is in stark contrast to an **overall sharp decline in the violent crime rate**.

Charts II and III confirm this disconnect: Violent crime is going down, but homicides are increasing. What would explain this? As Chief Bowers of the EPD points out, the large majority of Erie homicides in the last five years have occurred as a result of drug conflict, bar fights, neighborhood or family feuds, and do not pose a grave threat to the general public. Most murders occur within a very defined geographic area in the heart of the city.

Chart II: UCR Graph – Erie Violent Crime Data

Still, it must be acknowledged that the rise of **Erie's homicide rate is a matter of concern, especially since it is a sharp contrast to a dramatic decline across the U.S.**

As the *New York Times* reported on January 13, 2015 violent crime in the nation peaked in the early 1990s. Since then **the nation's rate of violent crime has fallen by half**.

Specifically the Times article noted a **51%** national drop in violent crimes since its peak in the 1990s, **48%** in robbery, **41%** in rape, and **56%** in murder.

In particular It pointed out that the national murder rate plunged from a peak of **10.2** homicides per 100,000 people in **1980** to **4.5** homicides in 2013, a rate that is significantly lower than Erie's 5 year average rate of **8.3**.

Chart III: EPD vs. UCR Violent Crime Data

	EPD Data	UCR Data
2014	512	325 (proj.)
2013	**696**	457
2012	**724**	458
2011	**694**	431
2010	**689**	491
2009	580	472
2008	646	-

Erie's **violent crime rate**, however, does to a large degree follow the national decline in violent crime. Further, the amount of violent crime is a better indicator for determining **the general level of public safety than the number of homicides**.

Murder, as deplorable as it is, does **not** always represent a general safety concern. Random killing – the sort that would pose a general public safety risk – is rare in Erie.

The rate of violent crime, a category which includes not only **murder but also rape, robbery and aggravated assault** which provides a more accurate assessment of public safety.

According to the UCR, **457** violent crimes were committed in Erie during 2013, **458** in 2012 and in 2011, a total of **431**.

The commission of violent crimes in these three years are relatively consistent, but how do they compare to Erie's overall pattern of the last 15 years? As EPD data in Chart II shows, Erie has rebounded

dramatically from the high crime rate years of **2006 to 2008**, when the city experienced on average **550** violent crimes per year.

In **2008**, the most violent year in the last 15 years, there were an unprecedented **646** violent crimes. This was **188** more violent crimes than in 2012; **215** more than in 2011 and **234** more than 2014.

However, a better understanding Erie's of violent crime rate can be gained through a comparative analysis. To do this we sought cities in the surrounding states that were closest to Erie's population and chose Allentown and Reading in Pennsylvania, Albany in New York and Canton in Ohio.

In **2013**, Allentown passed Erie as the third most populous city in Pennsylvania. Allentown's rate eclipsed Erie's by **100 violent crimes in 2012, 120 crimes in 2011, and 200 in 2010**. While Allentown has made impressive strides in recent years, steadily lowering its violent crime rate, it still surpasses that of Erie.

As Chart IV shows, Erie's violent crime rate compares even more favorably to other similar sized regional cities. In 2013, **Erie's rate** of **453** violent crimes per 100,000 residents was **by far the lowest** among our comparative group. **Albany, NY had** a violent crime rate of **807**; **Reading, PA a rate of 843**; **Canton, OH** a rate of **927**.

Unquestionably, Erie is one of the least violent and therefore safest cities of its size in the tri-state area, and has been for at least the last four years.

Chart IV: Violent Crime in Comparable Cities

	City	Population	Violent Crime	Per 100,000
2013				
	Albany, NY	97,956	791	807
	Reading, PA	88,107	743	843
	Canton, OH	72,598	673	927
	Allentown, PA	119,277	628	526
	Erie, PA	**100,814**	**457**	**453**
2012				
	Reading, PA	88,557	828	935
	Albany, NY	98,187	802	817
	Canton, OH	72,914	729	1,000
	Allentown, PA	119,334	653	547
	Erie, PA	**101,972**	**458**	**449**
2011				
	Albany, NY	98,296	939	955
	Canton, OH	73,060	810	1,109
	Reading, PA	88,363	758	858
	Allentown, PA	118,408	647	546
	Erie, PA	**102,111**	**431**	**422**
2010				
	Albany, NY	92,713	981	1,058
	Reading, PA	81,370	767	943
	Allentown, PA	108,473	732	675
	Canton, OH	77,938	652	837
	Erie, PA	**104,077**	**491**	**472**

A great deal of credit for Erie's enviable position accrues to Mayor Joe Sinnott's police department policies which have emphasized public safety despite severe budget limitations. The mayor's approach has included significantly reducing administrative positions while strengthening police numbers on the streets, thereby alleviating significantly the drop in numbers of the total police force.

The Media: Creating Public Perception about Crime

If violent crime in Erie is far less in other similar sized cities why do we perceive a significant threat to public safety in Erie?

To answer this question, we must ask another question: Where are our perceptions of threat originating? Reviewing media stories from the past few years reveals a clear pattern. **In 2011, a year in which violent crime decreased by 14%, gun violence was nonetheless voted by print media as the top story of the year.**

This year, once again, **media** stories citing Erie's "gun violence problem" appear almost daily. The repeated theme infers that gun violence is increasing because of an increase in "reported shots fired."

As an *Erie Times-News* article proclaimed: "officers have responded to 400 shots-fired calls since January 1 ... a significant increase over the number of shots-fired calls responded to in 2013."

The *Erie Times-News* article (January 18, 2015)

also ably highlighted the Erie community's growing concern over the past year with the increase in gunfire.

> While Erie's crime rate has been higher in the past, there is something different and alarming in the frequency with which gunfire shatters Erie's neighborhoods, streets and nights. We all know it. We're all talking about it. There's a sense that something fundamental has been ripped from Erie's civic fabric.

> There's a perception that too many of our young adults are falling into a life of mayhem, living and dying by the gun. Few of Erie's resident would disagree with these sentiments and even fewer would challenge the assumption that the causes of this disturbing development must be addressed.

Despite this very real concern it must be firmly pointed out that 'gunshots fired' do not automatically correlate with an **increase** in either murders or violent crime rates!

> As Erie Police Chief Randy Bowers explains:

> I don't think there used to be as many reports of shots fired, but it has become trendy to report them now. Some are just fireworks. We try to distinguish between **reported** shots fired and **actual** shots fired, but it is somewhat difficult to do that.

The media, on the other hand, often seems less inclined to make such distinctions – continually **reporting calls of shots-fired** rather than **confirmed shots fired**.

Advances in record-keeping also may add to our growing sense of gun violence. Chief Bowers admits that, until recently, shots fired and other gun-related

statistics weren't consistently tracked. Since this information is now available, we equate increased public awareness of gun activity as indicative of a rise in violent crime rates which the statistics do **not** support.

A cursory review of Erie print and TV media reveals a general pattern. Crime reports make up a **significant part of the local news** nearly every day.

One of the reasons is that police and fire departments serve as excellent primary sources with a daily list of crime and tragedy stories for media outlets to cover. Usually, these stories take far less time and effort to produce than others, require less investigation into sources, witnesses, context and details. The media with time slots and pages to fill, stories with familiar arcs that take little-to-no-research or investigation – merely a phone call to a police or fire department contact – become understandably attractive. As an added bonus, **crime stories have been found to draw larger ratings and more readers than just about any other type of story**. The old adage, **"if it bleeds, it leads,"** remains true today.

But a fair question must be asked about the degree to which media coverage affects public perception about actual safety. It may be that public nervousness about safety is present regardless of the actual facts or media coverage. At least that's the rather startling research offered by Jonathan Rauch in an *Atlantic Monthly* (March, 2015) report on the divergence between **public perception** vs. **reality** regarding public safety. He writes that:

The reduction of criminal violence in America is one of the great success stories of our time. And how do Americans celebrate that extraordinary success – by denying it!

Gallup reports that every year, rain or shine the public insists by overwhelming margins (63%-20% in 2014) that crime has **risen**. Criminologists say that many people get angry when they are told that crime is decreasing.

Why so? Paul Pitzer, a Harvard Psychologist, in a recent speech on why Americans odd refusal to appreciate their safety offered this intriguing explanation:

People are hard wired to overreact to threats, real or perceived... in the world we evolved humans needed to be hypersensitive [about their environment]... people are biased to overestimate the sorts of events that stand out in our memory as violence and mayhem do and as peace and quiet do not.
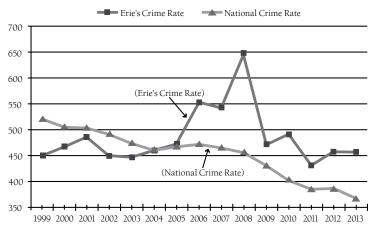
Pitzer faults alarmists and politicians for stoking public concerns about safety but concludes that "it seems unlikely that American threat perception has ever been as distorted as it is today."

Both Rauch and Pitzer's comments do raise a rather intriguing question – Are the media creating the public overreaction to safety questions or are they just simply confirming fears that are always present in the public mind – the facts not withstanding."

ERIE CRIME VS.
THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

While Erie certainly has reason to be proud of its **regional** position vis-à-vis violent crime statistics, its national position is not so rosy as Erie does have a higher violent crime rate than the national average.

Chart V: Erie's Violent Crime Rate
vs National Average

From 1999 to 2005, Erie's violent crime rates were close to or the same as the national averages for communities with 100,000 residents.

However, Chart V shows that **since 2006 Erie's violent crime rate has exceeded the national average every single year.** Comprehensive data from 2013 shows Erie with **457** violent crimes, a figure which is historically good and exemplary in the region, but which surpasses the **national average of 367,** by 90 violent crimes.

What has caused Erie's higher than the national average violent crimes rate for the last seven years? One reason often cited is the economic stress which is thought to cause high unemployment and endemic poverty. Although this is certainly may be a factor, it does not appear to be the main root cause. Erie's rate of unemployment has been the same or very similar to the national rates.

A more convincing reason for Erie's higher than the national rate of violent crimes may be the size of Erie's police force. At the start of 2003, Erie's police force had **214 officers**. **By 2006**, the first year that Erie's crime rate **exceeded the national average**, the EPD had shrunk to only **167** officers. **The size of the police force hit its lowest point, 161, in 2008**. Since 2008, the force has increased to **173 officers** and remains at that level. As former EPD Lieutenant Kirk Werner states, "Imagine what effect losing a sizeable portion of your force can have on the ways you are used to operating."

One of the largest impacts of police reduction has been the loss of specialized units. As Werner states:

> There was a family crisis unit, a K-9 unit and a juvenile division – we used to have 3 officers on each shift working family crisis and 4 officers who did only juvenile crime. Considering that a large portion of crime is committed by young people and about half of the calls received are domestic related, the loss of these units had a huge impact: Now all [juvenile crimes and domestic situations] are handled by the street officer.

Today, Erie's ratio of police at **1.7 officers per**

1,000 residents, falls significantly beneath the **national average of 2.2.** Erie falls **even further below** the **2.7 officers** per 1,000 residents which is the average for **Middle Atlantic cities** of similar populations.

Increasing the number of police would create an ancillary opportunity for it would present an opportunity to **diversify the social composition of the police force**.

Recommendations

⸰Improving EPD Diversity

Since this summer's conflict between residents and police in Ferguson, MO, the social diversity of the nation's police force has come under greater scrutiny. Looking at Erie's most recent census data of 2010, Caucasian **residents make up 75% of the population, black residents make up 16.87%, while Hispanic and Latino residents account for 6.9%.** The Erie police force, however, **has only four black and two Hispanic/Latino officers** in its 173 member police force, making **Erie's police force 96% white, 2.3% black and 1.1% Hispanic/Latino**.

Increasing the presence of minority officers on beat patrols, especially in neighborhoods with high percentages of minority residents, could **facilitate healthier police-community relations** – a crucial step in reaching out to neighborhoods with concentrated crime.

In the February 9, 2015, an article in *New Yorker*

magazine, authors Patterson and Fosse voiced concerns that "despite the lower crime rate, **black culture is in trouble**," and that there is "an alarming **increase in the percentage of black youth who are structurally disconnected** over the past decade." Fosse cited survey data showing that nearly **25%** of black youth were disconnected in **2012** while the white youth disconnected rate remained below **15%**.

Recent events in Erie involving the rise in gun use especially among young black males who have been caught up in inner-city family conflict and selling of drugs seem to support Fosse's disconnected analysis. Minority police in the neighborhood may be able to reduce alienation and connect youth to their neighborhoods.

Increasing the diversity of Erie's police force will not be an easy fix for it is an old problem. The diversity of Erie's police force was legally questioned in the 1970s when in April of 1973, U.S. District Court Judge Gerald Weber ordered the Erie Police Department to include at least 10 black officers in the next 20 officers to be hired to better represent the social composition of the community.

It took only one day for Mayor Louis J. Tullio to announce his decision to appeal Weber's order, claiming that it was "reverse discrimination." Then Erie Councilman Mario Bagnoni publicly announced that because City Council had the final authority in the hiring of police officers and was not named directly in the federal suit, he intended to ignore the order and hire "whoever they choose." Bagnoni stated,

"I'm only concerned with test scores ... Let us make our decision on that alone." Nevertheless, one month short of a year after the initial court order to hire 10 black officers was issued, the federal order was upheld by the court. Yet today the police force once again remains largely white.

Perhaps, 40 years later, it is time for another corrective order from the courts to eliminate systemic discrimination. The chief of Police appears to concur but points out that there are new challenges today that must be considered. As Chief Bowers states:

> It's clear we need some other way ... to be able to hire minority candidates. But [to do so] flies in the face of the civil service law and Veterans Preference. I don't know a way around it. That is our big challenge.

Racial imbalance is certainly not unique to Erie; it is a common problem in many American cities, including those in Pennsylvania where hiring practices are heavily influenced by the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission. Chart VI which contains data on EPD hiring statistics from 2010 through 2013 offers some important insights into factors affecting hiring of Erie police officers.

Chart VI: EPD Test Statistics, 2010-2013

	Took Exam	Passed Exam	Vets	Eligibility List
White Female	58	34 (59%)	2	9 (26%)
Black Female	13	8 (62%)	0	4 (50%)
Hispanic Female	4	1 (25%)	0	0
TOTAL	**75**	**43 (57%)**	**2**	**13 (30%)**

	Took Exam	Passed Exam	Vets	Eligibility List
White Male	485	281 (58%)	59	109 (39%)
Black Male	49	22 (45%)	4	8 (36%)
Hispanic Male	25	8 (32%)	0	1 (13%)
TOTAL	**559**	**311 (56%)**	**63**	**118 (38%)**

For example, the chart reveals that while black males pass the exam at a **13%** lower level than white males they survive better in meeting some of the other criteria (physical, psychological, mental, background checks) enabling them to reach some parity (39-36) with white males who made the eligibility hiring list.

However, actual selection is often influenced by the Veterans' Preference Bonus, requiring that 10 points be added to the test scores of applicants who are veterans. Favoring veterans in police hiring is not unique to Pennsylvania and stems from a widely held belief that military experience and training is an excellent background for police work, especially in urban areas. Veterans' preference also reflects widely

held public opinion that a veteran's service to the country justifies "special consideration." The ultimate result of such an advantage, however, is that the goal of diversity often takes a back seat. In Erie only **two blacks,** one male and one female, and just one **male Hispanic** were hired in the last four years compared to **sixteen whites,** all but one of whom were **male** and **half of whom were veterans**.

Another factor worth noting is that there are not enough women and black candidates applying and taking the police exam. While a total of **62** blacks (49 males and 13 females) took the police exam, a much better percentage than previous years, the black applicants still represents just **9.8%** of the City of Erie's black population of **16.8%.**

One obvious suggestion emerging from Chart VI data for increasing the number of black EPD candidates is to recruit more African-American male and female candidates who have **military experience**. The increased recruiting of black females seems particularly promising as **62% of black females** passed the police exam which is better percentage than either black or white males.

There are other novel approaches to improving EPD diversity worthy of consideration. A recent *New York Times* article, **"In Many Cities, Police Struggle for Diversity,"** highlights a different approach taken by a neighboring town in the suburbs of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights.

Cleveland Heights, has adopted a **two-tiered**

hiring approach to hiring police officers. **The first tier officer is civil service tested, as in Erie, but with a few noticeable differences. For each opening the Police Chief may select any of the candidates within the top ten scores – allowing him to choose applicants with more applicable experience or other valuable traits over those who merely test well.**

In Cleveland Heights, **Veterans Preference earns** candidates only **5 automatic points, compared to the 10 points in Erie** that is required by state law. In addition, Cleveland Heights applicants **who reside within the city unlike Erie are awarded 5 points** toward their final score. As an additional incentive to live within the city, officers with city residences are encouraged to take their patrol cars home with them, not only a convenience for the officer, but an additional safety measure for his/her neighborhood.

The **second-tier officers** in Cleveland Heights **are known as a basic patrol officers**. The Police Chief selects these applicants based on **interviews, resumes, background investigation, and any special qualifications or experience. These second-tier officers or basic patrol officers, do not take the civil service exam**, but in order to ensure the quality and preparedness of the officer, **they must still pass police academy requirements. They** are eligible to receive full police powers **only** upon graduation.

Second-tier officers make less each month than civil-service hires, although **benefits for both**

tiers are similar. These **basic patrol officers are generally assigned to beats within troubled neighborhoods** to focus on community relations. **After a probationary period**, basic patrol officers are offered tuition reimbursement and receive **20% added to their score when taking the civil service test** due to their experience on the force.

As a result of these hiring practices, Cleveland Heights, **whose black population represents 40% of the community, has a police force where 20% are black officers**.

While Pittsburgh and Philadelphia also have Veterans Preference, **both cities also** award from 2 to 5 points for completing college associate or baccalaureate degrees, thus achieving a better educated force – and balancing some effects of Veterans Preference.

Other cities have successfully restructured their police recruiting policies. Currently, Vancouver is experimenting with a pilot project funded for 2013 to 2016 called the **Vancouver Police Community Safety program**. Vancouver has created a **Community Safety Unit where members assist the regular police force with lower-level, lower-risk tasks,** tasks that don't require specialized police training, but do fall under the duties of police officers. These employees are paid hourly and require less extensive training which drastically reduces their cost to the city. **As a result, the police officers have more time to focus on maintaining proper patrols and on executing higher-level, proactive police work.**

⋅Promote Preventative Policing

Looking back, concentrated crime in Erie's center city began in the early 1990s, when crime settled into the "Hood" and "Holly" neighborhoods. A longtime resident of this area, Paul Gambill, described the warning signs of criminal activity, stating, "you had large groups of individuals hanging out in the streets and on the corners at all hours. There was obvious open-air drug dealing." Gambill also cited an increase in random shootings, street prostitution, absentee landlords, abandoned homes and "speakeasies" (establishments that sell stolen or illegal goods) as components of the crime problem in the neighborhoods.

Obviously, Gambill didn't feel safe: "I was reporting to city officials illegal activity every day." As a result, an official during the Savocchio administration reached out to Gambill, encouraging him and other concerned neighbors to enroll in the Citizens Police Academy and to organize a Neighborhood Watch Program.

The Citizens Police Academy and the Neighborhood Watch Program sprang from the Savocchio administration's belief that residents needed to be involved in order to stop the crime in their area. Unfortunately residents who witnessed crimes were afraid to come forward because of fear of retribution. In addition, residents often don't trust police. The result is that there are no witnesses to testify and no victims pressing charges and many of those committing crimes go free to continue criminal acts.

Former Mayor Savocchio commented that, "it took time to convince residents that the Neighborhood Watch was necessary to ending crime, especially in the most stressed neighborhoods." Gambill admits that while he too held a negative opinion of the police, he has come to see the police through the Citizens Police Academy as individuals and to understand the difficulty of their role.

The Citizens Police Academy (CPA) taught residents their own role in preventing crime in their neighborhoods. Gambill explains, "we learned that we had to be very aggressive, targeting the obvious signs of crime by reporting the open-air drug dealing and speakeasies."

Through the investment and support of the succeeding Filippi administration, the Neighborhood Watch groups focused on eliminating crime through a restorative process. This included seeking cooperation from absentee landlords and working with a well-funded Redevelopment Authority to remove abandoned homes and reduce blight and thereby draw homeowners back to the area.

In addition to encouraging the efforts of Neighborhood Watch groups, a more fully-staffed police force fought crime by forging partnerships with outside agencies. Former EPD Community Affairs Officer, Lieutenant Kirk Werner points to one such partnership that proved effective:

> When I got the chance I did some research. On weekends, 25% of calls are from problem bars where people are fighting or shooting ... If you have

a problem bar in your neighborhood, it ruins the community. There is garbage all over the place, people urinating in yards, and it drives people away. I was in contact with a bunch of agencies, so that if we couldn't do something law enforcement wise, we could find code violations, fire violations, and health violations to get rid of these bars. That's how you clean up the neighborhoods.

This, and other creative solutions which often led to grant funding, were a major force in crime prevention during the 1990s. As a result of partnerships, and the benefit of a better-staffed, community-oriented police force, violent crime was eventually reduced in troubled neighborhoods. Werner did note, however, that "when we pushed crime out of the Hood and Holly, it began migrating into other parts of the city."

Today, center city neighborhoods are again home to the same signs of concentrated crime once found in the 1990s in the Hood and Holly areas. Paul Gambill explains the reasons for the reemergence:

You have a large, diverse influx of immigrants and a large, poor black and Hispanic population and as a result, there are few homeowners." The area is, instead, populated with landlords and tenants, who often have less pride in their homes and neighborhoods, and these blighted, areas attract crime. With the police spread so thin, **efforts to focus on outreach** to neighborhoods and creative partnerships for **crime prevention have significantly declined**. As a result, today's Erie police force currently has neither the time nor strength to introduce **more effective, proactive programs**.

Despite the bleak assessment, some very positive progress has been made in implementing preventive policing through a joint effort by the District Attorney, the EPD, and the Regional U.S. Attorney called "Unified Erie." This partnership has identified Erie's chronic violent offenders, gun users and fugitives with the goal of removing them from the streets one-by-one with a three-pronged approach of enforcement, prevention and re-entry. This type of program has been successful in other communities. "Unified Erie" has launched a truancy reduction effort and expanded the **Parade Street Blue Coats** composed of African-American men focused on conflict resolution, counseling and monitoring with positive results in the Strong Vincent High School area.

As District Attorney Jack Daneri stated:

The prevention arm of the initiative – the CAP (Community Action Plan) ... has targeted community disorganization ... one of the root causes of criminal activity ... and the recently created NRO (Neighborhood Resource Organization) funded in part by the Erie Community Foundation provides services to neighborhood groups to organize ... I feel more confident than ever with the approach **all of us are taking to make Erie safer**.

Clearly such efforts are not only quite promising in compensating for the reduction in police force numbers but are also effective in Erie's long-term strategy for reducing its rate of violent crime relative to the national rate of violent crime.

In summary, despite continuing concern about public safety in Erie, the facts are clear:

- **The city as a whole is reasonably safe**

- **Community partnerships such as the Neighborhood Resources Organization and the Parade Street Blue Coats along with continuing Neighborhoods Watch programs are thriving and making Erie safer.**

- **Erie's police continue to do an impressive job despite the constraint of resources** as evidenced by **Erie's comparative regional position on violent crime rates**.

Nevertheless, move can and should be done to reduce violent crime in Erie. We need to adopt innovative, **financially responsible, and sustainable methods** to improve public safety. There are models that offer solutions.

Erie police need to adopt the goals of becoming a friendly presence in troubled neighborhoods, of developing partnerships aimed at battling blight, and reestablishing the specialized units critical to providing optimal service to the city.

One specialized unit might be Predictive Policing programs used by the LAPD. Predictive Policing uses software proven to leverage odds to deter crime in hotspots. It concentrates on **career criminals that commit most of the serious crime**.

Another specialized unit could be reactivating the family crisis and juvenile units, leaving regular patrolmen free to devote their time and effort to

providing a stronger, preventive presence in the city.

Any new units would require more police, **at least 200 officers** to operate effectively, with the optimal number, according to national and regional averages somewhere around **220**.

Just adding more police or even suggesting that the increase in police elsewhere is primarily the reason for the decline of violent crime may only be part of a more comprehensive solution. In the view of Inimai Chettiar whose research team studied 30 years of data collected from all 50 states and America's 50 largest cities to determine the cause in the significant decline in American crime. Writing in the February 2015 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, she notes that there are numerous causes of America's decline in violent crime. For example, she sharply challenged the idea that extensive incarceration was the major reason. Instead she found multiples reasons for differences in violent crime rates noting the following:

Percentage effect on reducing national crime:

· Growth in Income (5-10%)

· Changes in Alcohol Consumption (5-10%)

· Aging Population (0-5%)

· Decreased Unemployment (0-3%)

· Policing (0-10%)

· Comp Stat Utilization by Police (5-15%)

›FISCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The most obvious obstacle to adding more police is, of course, their expense to an already over extended city budget. If new programs to reduce violent crime are to be implemented, new revenue sources must be found.

Erie officials should consider solutions that have worked in other communities to strengthen public safety.

For example, developing a **social impact investment fund,** aimed specifically at strengthening the police department, could offer a potential funding option. In this type of funding interested **local companies**, **organizations or individuals create an investment account from which the city could draw a specified percentage for the improving of public safety. Perhaps 5%** would be available for use by the EPD for funding new police costs. These investors, after an agreed upon period (normally **five years**), would have the option of withdrawing their original investment or allowing the money to be reinvested once again for another five years.

Another funding possibility might be the levying of a special **Public Safety Tax,** enacted through a special public referendum and with final approval by both city council and the mayor. The revenue from this special tax would be reserved **specifically**, by law, for **public safety**. The legality of this approach for third-class cities is unclear, and would need further investigation or perhaps intervention by Erie's state representatives.

Another financing approach might be the creation of a **special public safety fund** supported by **civic organizations such as the Erie Community Foundation**, **Erie Insurance**, **General Electric, and other civic-minded local businesses and individual citizens**. Such a public safety fund of at least $1,500,000 annually might be created for a **five year period**, after which the effectiveness of the public fund would be evaluated to assess its future continuance. If proven successful in reducing crime, the program would eventually be absorbed in **the regular city budget**.

Conclusion

Let's celebrate! Erie is one of the safest cities in the tri-state area.

Let's acknowledge that Erie's statistics on violent crime need to be brought into compliance with national violent crime statistics.

Let's decide what can and should be done to improve Erie's public safety. Let's find out what innovative programs could be developed to reduce violent crime in Erie, and then implement them.

Let's agree and explore ways to raise the racial diversity numbers to be more representative of the community.

Let's lead the way to making Erie an example in public safety in the **nation**!