



AV Remarks on Policing for Preventing and Solving Crime Before the Washington State House of Representatives' Community Safety Committee

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Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Marc Krupanski, and I serve as the Director of Criminal Justice Policy at Arnold Ventures. We are a national philanthropy focused on maximizing opportunity and minimizing injustice by funding rigorous causal research studies and then working to turn this evidence into policy. Today, I'm happy to share some of what the strongest causal research tells us about what works in policing for preventing and solving crime.

Over the last decade, the evidence base in policing has grown significantly. We now have dozens of high-quality studies, including randomized controlled trials and natural experiments, that point in the same direction. I want to highlight four of the clearest lessons from that research:

1. Police staffing and workforce capacity matter.
2. How you use police matters. Strategic deployment — especially hot-spots and problem-oriented policing — reduces violence.
3. Improving investigations and solving crimes delivers both justice and prevention. We have done a poor job on this.
4. Data and transparency are essential to improving policing and community trust.

Let me take each one in turn.

First: Police staffing and workforce capacity matter.

The research here is consistent. When cities increase their police workforce, crime goes down. In a nationwide review, Aaron Chalfin in 2022 found that city-level increases in staffing are associated with measurable reductions in violent crime. Chalfin found that for every ten to seventeen officers hired, **one murder is prevented each year in a large American city.**

That is a striking effect size.

Daniel Nagin's 2013 study reaches the same conclusion, but with an important clarification: the mechanism at play here is not police making more arrests or through more severe penalties, but rather through deterrence because potential offenders believe they will be caught. In fact, the studies show that crime decreases without an increase in arrests for serious or violent offenses and without an increase in incarceration. In other words, policing works because people respond to the likelihood of accountability. This means that increased staffing does not need to mean an increase in aggressive tactics to have positive effects.

However, without clear strategic direction — as I'll discuss next — we can see an increase in arrests for lower-level misdemeanor offenses. In these same studies, these arrests have been found not to reduce more serious and violent crime but do carry unintended social and economic consequences for individuals and communities impacted.

Overall, however, modern policing can reduce crime without increasing incarceration.

Before moving to the next point — I know we all want to improve police staffing but agencies have struggled to meet staffing targets. Most jurisdictions have sought to address this by increasing pay but with limited success — something Jeff Asher has documented. We are supporting several evaluations regarding what works and some of the initial findings we see are that when departments that shorten hiring timelines, engage in more consistent and regular outreach to candidates, and emphasize job quality they are attracting stronger candidates and retaining them through the recruitment process. Another approach is to intentionally broaden the recruitment pool through initiatives like the 30x30 Initiative, which seeks to improve recruitment of women who are woefully underrepresented in agencies.

Also, what we are seeing from agencies across the country is that does not mean only sworn staff. It means the right mix of detectives, analysts, forensic specialists, civilian investigators, and victim advocates. That is part of the modern workforce model.

This brings me to the next point:

Second: how police are deployed is just as important as how many we have.

Crime isn't evenly distributed. Decades of research tell us that crime tends to cluster at very small locations and among a relatively small group of people. That means the most effective policing models aren't about being everywhere — they are about being **where the risk is highest**.

One of the most studied approaches is hot-spots policing. Essentially, hot spots policing is the use of robust data sets to identify where and when crime is happening and by whom and directing officers to those locations accordingly. Randomized trials by Sherman and Weisburd (1995) in Minneapolis and a meta-analysis by Braga et al. (2019) find that hot-spots policing reduces both violent and property crime. Chalfin (2024) and Nagin (2013) find the same thing: strategically deploying officers to crime concentrations prevents violence. Importantly, it appears to do so without simply pushing it into neighboring areas.

Problem-oriented policing is also proven to effectively hold offenders accountable and prevent future crimes. Problem-oriented policing is a policing strategy that focuses on identifying and addressing the root causes of recurring crime and disorder, rather than just reacting to individual incidents. By analyzing the underlying conditions that create problems, police can develop and implement targeted, long-term solutions that involve community members and other agencies.

Example of a problem-oriented response:

- **Problem:** A specific park is frequently the site of vandalism and drug-related activity.
- **Analysis:** An analysis reveals that the problem is not just about crime but is exacerbated by poor lighting, overgrown shrubbery that provides cover, and a lack of community use.
- **Response:** Instead of just increasing patrols, police work with the city to install better lighting, trim the bushes, and partner with a local community group to organize events in the park.
- **Assessment:** Police and the community monitor the park to see if vandalism and drug activity decrease after the changes are made.

The lesson is that precision matters. Strategies succeed when they are focused and analytical — not broad or reactive.

Third: improving investigations and solving crimes is one of the most important levers we have.

Research shows that increasing the likelihood that perpetrators are caught and held accountable is one of the most effective crime deterrents. But too many crimes go unsolved today, leaving offenders undeterred. The national average homicide clearance rate is 59%; it is lower for other violent offenses, and, while property crimes often have clearance rates under 15%. In 2023, Washington state clearance rate for murder was approximately 60% — essentially, it's a coin flip if you'll be arrested for murder.

I want to say upfront: this is not about blaming police or blaming communities. It's about recognizing that the system we built has not been designed or resourced to prioritize solving crimes, even though that's the pathway to real justice.

There are a number of reasons why we've gotten here, including emphasizing severity of punishment over the certainty, but I want to focus here on the benefits and solutions of improving clearance rates and certainty.

What we know about increasing certainty:

- **Combating crime:** Decades of empirical research show that people are more deterred from committing crime by the likelihood of being caught than by the severity of the sentence. Certainty of punishment produces both specific (individuals stop reoffending) and general (others are discouraged) deterrent effects.
- **Building trust:** Certainty may also build public confidence in the criminal justice system. Predictable consequences can increase perceived legitimacy of the justice system, leading to a virtuous cycle of more witness cooperation and less criminal behavior. There's good reason to believe that solving more crimes, more quickly, would increase public trust in law enforcement and reduces retaliatory cycles of violence, especially in communities where clearance rates are especially low.
- **Reducing incarceration:** If individuals believe they will be caught, they're less likely to offend, which should reduce the need for incarceration. For this reason, modest sanctions that are swift and predictable will likely be far more cost-effective than our current system of lower-probability but severe punishments.

Research on investigations consistently points to the same set of practices that matter most:

- Detective training, supervision, caseload reduction, and structured investigative steps matter.
- Modernizing forensic capacity improves outcomes — rapid DNA, NIBIN, and real-time crime centers increase clearance odds under certain conditions.
- Victim and witness participation is a critical determinant of clearance.
- Solving non-fatal shootings is a prevention strategy.

As Marshall Clement from CSG will discuss more of these in detail, I want to focus in on this last point: the need to prioritize solving nonfatal shootings. A number of cities, such as Philadelphia, Denver, and Columbus, are showing us that treating nonfatal shootings as seriously as homicides lowers retaliatory violence. Nationwide, nonfatal shootings are typically not treated with the same priority as homicides, in part due to resource constraints, but the reality is that, often, the difference between a homicide and nonfatal shooting is simply a matter of inches of where the bullet struck, or the difference in minutes that it took to arrive to the emergency room. We also know that nonfatal shootings can spur a cycle of retaliatory violence that ends in a homicide. Thus, when nonfatal shootings

are investigated quickly and thoroughly, future homicides fall. In Columbus, the police department created a dedicated Non-Fatal Shooting Team. That unit has solved about 75 percent of its first seventy-eight cases, and the city has seen a large increase in homicide clearance as well. Meanwhile, in the first year that Denver created its Firearm Assault Shoot Team (FAST), they reported an increase an increase in clearance rates from about 25 percent to nearly 70.

The takeaway is simple: solving violent crime today prevents violent crime tomorrow. Investigations are not just about accountability — they are about prevention.

Fourth, and finally: data and transparency are essential.

Finally, one of the most important findings from the last decade of research is that modern policing requires modern data. For years, police tracked the things that were important but also easier — calls for service and response times — but often lacked the most important data: investigative timelines, solvability, victim engagement, and clearance rates.

Cities that have strengthened investigations have also strengthened their use of data. Denver publishes performance measures for homicide and nonfatal shooting investigations. Baltimore tracks investigative workload and the performance of civilian investigators. And cities have reorganized investigative data systems to track case status, staff allocation, and priorities in real time.

But the research also shows a caution. When data becomes a scoring mechanism — a pressure system — it can distort behavior. The most effective agencies use data for problem-solving, resource decisions, case prioritization, and transparency, not for punitive scorekeeping. Data should inform a strategy, not be the strategy.

Closing

So the picture from the research is clearer today than it has been in decades:

- We need sufficient police staffing and capacity.
- Those officers should be deployed strategically and precisely.
- We should invest in investigations and case-solving.
- And we should build modern data systems to measure progress and improve trust.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this research. I look forward to your questions and to supporting any discussions you may have about improving public safety in Washington State.