



# Taking back the streets

## Ohio initiative combines law enforcement, rehabilitation and community approaches to battle violent neighborhood crime

by Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine

The announcement in Akron last year introducing our Ohio Attorney General's Office "Safe Neighborhoods Initiative" took place against a sobering backdrop.

In that city during the early months of 2013, an intruder broke into a home and killed a 16-year-old girl with a single gunshot to her head. She was four months pregnant.

During another incident, four people were senselessly gunned down at a local housing project. And later in the same month, a developmentally disabled young man was shot to death at the fast-food restaurant where he was simply trying to earn a living.

We started the initiative in Akron in part because a study my office commissioned on gun violence found that Summit County (where Akron is the county seat) had the third-largest number of high-rate violent offender convictions in the entire state. That means offenders who, despite having two violent felony convictions, go on to commit a third, a fourth or even more violent offenses.

This is simply not acceptable. That's why we're working directly with communities and local law enforcement to help them retake the streets from those who are carelessly committing repeated crimes.

The goal of the "Safe Neighborhoods Initiative" is to help steer violent criminals on a path toward a more productive life and, in the process, improve the lives of everyone living around them.

Here's an overview of our approach.

### Putting focus on core offenders

In 2011, we gathered statewide experts to examine the gun violence problem in the state. As part of the study done by Dr. Deanna Wilkinson of The Ohio State University, we found that less than 1 percent of the people in Ohio had two or more violent felony offenses but are responsible for 57 percent of Ohio's violent felony convictions.

As a result of that study, we worked with the state legislature to craft a proposal that imposes a mandatory prison sentence on those who have been convicted of two separate violent offenses, get out of prison, and then are caught possessing a gun. It also doubles the time that can be added to a sentence for a gun specification (meaning the offender had a firearm while committing the offense and displayed it, brandished it, used it to facilitate the offense or indicated that he or she possessed the firearm).

The bill is working its way through the legislative process, and we hope it will soon be passed.

Next, we put in place the "Safe Neighborhoods Initiative," a group violence-reduction strategy similar to what was sometimes called Operation Ceasefire in

Violent crimes <sup>1</sup> per 100,000 population in Midwest, 2002-2012				
State	2002	2007	2012	U.S. rank, 2012 <sup>2</sup>
Illinois	620.7	533.2	414.8	18
Indiana	357.2	333.6	345.7	26
Iowa	285.6	294.7	263.9	37
Kansas	376.6	452.7	354.6	23
Michigan	540.3	536.0	454.5	13
Minnesota	267.5	288.7	230.9	44
Nebraska	313.9	302.4	259.4	39
North Dakota	78.2	142.4	244.7	42
Ohio	351.3	343.2	299.7	30
South Dakota	177.4	169.2	321.8	27
Wisconsin	224.9	290.9	280.5	34
U.S. average	494.6	466.9	386.9	—

<sup>1</sup>Violent crimes are offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault.  
<sup>2</sup>State rankings include District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Source: FBI

Boston's original pilot program.

Here's how it works:

To start, high-crime neighborhoods are identified and the most violent neighborhood is targeted first. Then, the most-violent offenders and/or gang leaders are identified. Of those offenders, those who are on parole and probation are ordered to appear for a "call-in."

At the call-in, law enforcement tells the offenders about the prison sentences they'll face if they continue committing violent crime. A doctor describes the consequences of gunshot wounds. A friend or relative of a victim relays how violence devastates families. And a member of the clergy pleads for an end to the violence.

The offenders have the chance to walk away from the violence and are offered information about job training, substance abuse treatment, GED preparation and other social services.

They are also warned that if they don't stop committing violent crimes, law enforcement will come out in full force on the entire neighborhood.

This approach works because it confronts, head-on, what propels violence in the streets.

- First, it tells the offenders that the community wants the violence to stop; it tells them they're valued, and that the community wants them to succeed.

- Second, it offers help to offenders who want it.

- Third, it creates certain and credible consequences for homicides and shootings that are directed at gangs and violent groups, as a whole.

Similar programs have been effective in limiting gun-related violence in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis and Minneapolis.

In Baltimore's Cherry Hill neighborhood, its program was associated with a 56 percent reduction in homicides involving a gun and a 34 percent decline in nonfatal shootings.

In Ohio, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Middletown and Toledo have also undertaken versions of this program.

### Initial successes in two cities

The "Safe Neighborhoods Initiative" is currently underway in Akron and Warren, where individuals who have gone through this program have, so far, not been arrested for any new violent crimes. In addition, Lima had its first call-in on Jan. 24 of this year, and Steubenville's first was scheduled for Feb. 21.

We've added provisions to the initiative to make our efforts more holistic. For example, we've committed grant funds for Boys and Girls Clubs to expand their sites so that kids in violent neighborhoods have opportunities to thrive and have alternatives to violence.

We've also made our office's Bureau of Criminal Investigation resources available for, and focused some of the Ohio Peace Officer Training coursework on, gang-related activities. And we've used funds from the National Mortgage Settlement reached by the nation's attorneys general to enable the demolition of abandoned properties around the state that otherwise would have attracted crime and continued to blight neighborhoods.

Protecting families is the core function of government — nothing matters more.

With our "Safe Neighborhoods Initiative," we want to shield the kids who are growing up in every one of Ohio's most violent neighborhoods. They're trying to avoid the ever-present violence in their midst; they're dodging gunfire; they're trying simply to survive.

We must give these kids their childhood back. And we must do all we can to prevent more young mothers-to-be, housing project residents, and workers who are just starting out from needlessly losing their lives to violence. ✦

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine was elected in 2010 after having served for 30 years as a state senator, U.S. representative and senator, and Ohio's lieutenant governor.

### Submissions welcome

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