



## **Issues Impacting the New Orleans Police Department and the Criminal Justice System**

This draft report attempts to identify the key issues affecting the New Orleans Police Department in a Post-Katrina metropolitan New Orleans and reflects the best information and assessment at the present time.

presented by:

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The criminal environment of the City of New Orleans is the product of many long-term, socio-economic factors, but it is driven to extremes by the massive, systemic drug culture and the violence that is engendered by that lifestyle. Law enforcement professionals understand the huge impact that poverty and the drug culture have on overall crime and it needs not be explained in depth for purposes of this summary report. For those not “in the business”, just look to the significant spikes in crime suffered by the communities that “hosted” large numbers of displaced residents from New Orleans, and the criminal element that was with them, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Now, imagine the crime problem these same individuals create when they are all in one city and you begin to understand the current situation in New Orleans.

### **NOPD Personnel issues –**

NOPD’s personnel losses since the storm have been extreme. Locally, we have no competitive advantage in recruiting qualified applicants. We suffered a net loss of **217** officers in 2005 and **216** in 2006. As of April 5, 2007, we have lost **49** officers. One Police Academy class has graduated in 2007 with **38** new field trainees. A second group is currently in the Academy with **31** potential officers. It is estimated that at the current annual rate of loss, by the time the second class graduates we will still have a net loss for the year to date. Our 2005 high was 1741 officers. We are down **482** officers until the two current recruit classes complete field training and graduate. Our current effective personnel strength (total commissioned members minus those on long term illness/injury and all recruits) is 1227. This is a decrease of **514** officers. This is a net loss of almost 30% of our total 2005 personnel high-point.

### **Issues with retention –**

For reasons ranging from working conditions (loss of buildings and infrastructure of the Department), living conditions (post-Katrina housing is still an issue for many), schools, cost of living locally (significant impact from increased insurance rates and utilities), we have had a significant increase in personnel losses due to resignations and retirements. In the past, the rate has averaged about 6-7% per year. It is now over **15%** and shows no sign of declining.

New Orleans has lost over half of its resident population and a significant portion of its businesses. Neighboring parishes that were not devastated by flood waters have grown significantly, in both population and businesses. As a result, tax revenues in New Orleans have plunged and city services suffer, including the police department. Tax revenues in the unaffected cities and parishes (St. Tammany, Baton Rouge, and Jefferson) have increased significantly and allowed those areas to increase both services and salaries. Many of our most experienced and technically trained personnel have left the NOPD for other, nearby law enforcement agencies for higher pay, better facilities and a better quality of life. At present, we only have 1 qualified firearms examiner and 1 fingerprint examiner left.

Over 200 firearms examinations alone are backlogged, as well as, over 2000 narcotics tests.

Only a significant pay raise (more than just an offset to the local cost of living increases) will induce officers to remain and “re-evaluate” their retirement or career options, as well as allowing the department to recruit qualified applicants and officers from outside our immediate region. Based on national and regional data, an across-the-board base salary increase of 45 to 50% with some minimal, annual cost-of-living adjustment would be required.

### **Issues with recruiting –**

For many of the same reasons affecting retention, recruitment has been a problem locally. Even with extensive advertising campaigns by the New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation (NOPJF), recruiting bonuses and housing assistance, the NOPD is still “fishing in the same pond” as neighboring jurisdictions that have similar or higher salaries. They too have been forced to raise pay and benefits to retain and hire additional officers. They also have actual or perceived better living and working conditions, a main reason the NOPD has lost a significant number of experienced officers and specialists to nearby departments this year. We do not have the pay and incentive package necessary to recruit from outside our immediate region. Recruiting already trained and qualified officers from other departments outside our region is the only way the NOPD can strengthen its numbers in the short term and gain experienced, qualified officers able to work the streets immediately in any effective manner.

We have outlined an ad campaign to recruit former military. As soon as issues can be resolved with the POST Council on what military training can be counted toward POST training requirements thereby allowing former military to be treated as “lateral” entry, we will be able to actively recruit from this pool and possibly fill vacancies faster than a traditional “new” hire. Once again though, competitive pay will be the determining factor for where these quality applicants will apply and work.

### **Learning curve –**

Absent a significant change in salaries and benefits, the NOPD will continue to lose between 100-150 officers per year for the foreseeable future. Without immediate help from trained, lateral hires, we must rely on our own training of new recruits to replenish our ranks. The learning curve for new trainees is estimated at 7-8 months from the beginning of the Academy to their first permanent assignment after their Field Training Officer period. An additional 2 years of street experience is required after the Academy before they can function outside of a “calls-for-service” only capacity. With the staggering loss of senior, experienced officers and the crime problems facing the city, we cannot wait for new, entry level officers to gain experience. We must aggressively recruit lateral, experienced officers from other departments outside of our immediate region to fill our ranks and “hit the deck running”.

### **Administrative assignments –**

Recognizing that our personnel shortage is past critical, the NOPD has reviewed all personnel assignments that are not DIRECTLY related to providing police services “on the street”. An extensive analysis was done of all units in the Administrative and Support Bureau to determine the availability of commissioned personnel for reassignment to street duties. There are 90 commissioned members of all ranks in these Bureaus (including 10 captains, 6 lieutenants and 26 sergeants) supplemented by 15 commissioned members on administrative reassignment or limited duty due to injury or illness, from the Administrative Duties Division (ADD). 21 of the 85 currently staffed positions would have to retire or go to ADD if transferred to field duties. All of these units are operating at severe personnel shortage levels and any loss of personnel would likely tip the balance to a total loss of unit functionality. Since many of these units directly serve street operations, this is a critical issue. All commissioned personnel who are in administrative assignments MUST work 3 days a week in an Administrative Task Force to supplement the District personnel in the areas most affected by violent crime.

### **Criminal Justice System impact –**

The criminal justice system in New Orleans was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Both the Criminal Courts and the Orleans Parish District Attorney’s Office have suffered from the backlog of cases and a lack of prosecutors and indigent defenders. The District Attorney’s Office was suffering from understaffed and inexperienced prosecutors prior to the storm. These issues became even more critical after the loss of staff and facilities. As with the NOPD, the DA’s Office is unable to compete in the market place for qualified staff. The pre and post Katrina dysfunction of the criminal justice system has further exacerbated the crime problem by creating a mindset in the most violent offenders that they will not suffer for their crimes in New Orleans. They are further emboldened to commit more crimes.

With the criminal justice system only slowly coming back on-line locally, and given the huge backlog of cases that must eventually be screened and prosecuted, the demand for officers to appear in court will jump significantly. This need will remove those officers from their assigned duties and further reduce the number of commissioned personnel available at any given time to perform their regular duties. With the already low number of available officers, any further impact is significant.

If it were not for the unprecedented cooperation and assistance of the local U.S. Attorney, Jim Letten and the FBI, DEA, ATF, ICE and US Marshall’s Office, criminals in New Orleans would operate without fear of any punishment from the criminal justice system.

### **Potential impact –**

We have over 200 officers of all ranks eligible for immediate retirement with 25 or more years of service. Any additional significant negative impact on their working environment could cause a massive loss of these experienced members.

### **Personnel Assistance Summary -**

It is very difficult for the NOPD to set internal “benchmarks” on the release of assistance currently being provided by the Louisiana National Guard (300 members) and Louisiana State Police (60 Troopers). The LANG has worked side-by-side with the NOPD in the areas of the City most heavily damaged and least populated, to provide the extra personnel required to protect property where there are no “eyes and ears” of citizens to report activity. The LSP has provided high visibility coverage in the French Quarter and Downtown area to supplement the NOPD where the density of visitors and citizens is greatest.

The current class of police recruits will be completed with all training by the middle of June 2007 and available for per permanent field assignments. Another class should be available for permanent field assignments in November 2007. These classes, coupled with an active campaign to attract lateral entry personnel, our most reasonable estimate we for this year is 100-120 new officers by year’s end. This may not offset the losses we expect of 195-210 (based on trends of last 2 years) due to retirements and resignations. We cannot expect the LSP and LANG to continue to provide personnel support to the NOPD indefinitely. Each of these organizations has their own individual missions to meet and have graciously given of their limited resources for far longer than anyone expected. Given the demands on the US military today, the extra burden shouldered by the LANG in New Orleans could have a negative effect on our military’s overseas missions.

20 months after the storm, the NOPD is still operating in FEMA trailers. We have no HQ building. Three of eight District stations are still not repaired. We have no permanent Crime Lab facility (we moved to rented space at the University of New Orleans only last week), no Central Evidence and Property storage facility, no Special Operations Division / Traffic Division complex, no Juvenile Division holding facility. None of the facilities lost during the storm have been repaired/replaced. We are only a few months away from another hurricane season, which by all meteorological predictions will be active. We have an almost 50% likelihood of a storm affecting the city of New Orleans.

The lack of critical police facilities and capabilities is not only having a deleterious effect on the presentation and prosecution of cases, it has eroded the morale of the officers who see their best efforts to combat crime stalled due to our inability to adequately test and evaluate the evidence and watch as the same offenders are repeatedly arrested and released.

The NOPD is at a crossroads. We will never abandon our mission to “Serve and Protect” the citizens of New Orleans, but we are faced with the daily reality of an imminent collapse of our criminal justice institutions.