

Questions from Senator Thom Tillis for Sheriff Tom Dart

1. Sheriff Dart, besides carjackings, what new crime trends are you seeing at the local level?

In addition to carjackings, we have seen increases in retail theft, smash and grab burglaries, and robberies. We have also seen an increase in the utilization of guns in crimes.

2. Do you agree or disagree with those who advocate for defunding or abolishing the police?

We disagree. Policing is important component to public safety but it's not the only component to my office. We also police differently. We work hard to build the public's trust and let them know we are there for them. We put a focus on communication, transparency, and accountability. We know that policing alone cannot address root causes of criminal behavior. Individuals ordered to Cook County Jail have opportunities to take part in a wide array of programing including mental health, substance use, anti-violence, parenting, education, and job training. These programs have impact. Individuals who spend time in our programs are rebooked at lower rates than those who do not.

We have established a community engagement unit to start addressing some of those underlying issues as well as strengthen the bonds with the communities we serve. The unit works with organizations to bring self-defense classes and food deliveries for seniors as well as mentoring programs for children and teens.

We launched a virtual co-responder program to help individuals in crisis reduce their encounters with the criminal justice system. An officer encountering someone in crisis and needs to talk to someone, can instantly connect with a clinician who not only talks through their current concerns, but also helps them navigate services after their initial encounter.

3. What resources do you believe our law enforcement officers need to do their job?

Aerial assets – more helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles – will help increase public safety by allowing officers to follow offenders and their vehicles by air, reducing chances

the offending vehicle will crash and injure officers, innocent bystanders, or themselves. Aerial assets can also help find missing children and adults.

New software and electronic equipment will also help. How offenders commit crimes has changed and law enforcement needs to keep up. Technology that can help with tracking stolen vehicles, forensic access tools that can extract information from mobile phones are some of the tools out there that can help solve crimes quicker and more efficiently.

4. Do you support the hiring of more law enforcement to address the spike in crime, including carjackings?

Yes – we believe more officers on the streets conducting proactive policing and getting to know the people they serve is vital for creating safer communities. I have more police officers now than I have ever had, and I hope to continue to increase that number.

5. What challenges are you facing with recruitment and retention of officers in your office? What trends are contributing to these challenges, and what can be done to improve the recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers both in your county and across the country?

The Cook County Sheriff's Office has been facing hiring challenges over the last several years due to multiple factors including a negative perception of the overall law enforcement as well as changes in the job market that includes higher and competitive salaries in other sectors. The pandemic has also brought on new challenges and many applicants have expressed concerns of working in a congregate setting environment during a pandemic. The pandemic limited our in-person recruiting efforts and we had to quickly shift to a virtual recruiting platform, which limited our face-to-face interactions with potential applicants and the community. Recently, applicants have expressed the need to have flexibility in their work schedule, including the ability to work remotely, which is not possible for sworn positions.

We have been paying close attention to our resignations and retirement trends, and we are not able to keep up with our attrition rate. We are losing more a month in sworn positions than we can hire.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office has tried different recruitment and hiring strategies to improve our overall hiring numbers; however, we are not getting the applicant pool that we had in the past. We continue to be creative and look for other options that would increase interest in working for the Sheriff's Office. We continue to showcase the good work the Sheriff's Office does with public safety being our number one priority, as well as positively impacting the quality of life of individuals we encounter. We continue to

highlight the opportunity for growth within our organization and continue to explore other hiring incentives and increase our presence in the community.

Questions for the Record from Senator Charles E. Grassley
Hearing on “Federal Support for Preventing and Responding to Carjackings”
March 1, 2022

Thomas J. Dart
Sheriff
Cook County Sheriff’s Office
Chicago, IL

1. What effects has the “defund the police” movement had in Chicago and Cook County?

I cannot tell you what the impact has been because I am not sure how that could ever be verified. What I can tell you is that it is very hard to recruit and hire correctional officers and police officers. There seems to be a real reluctance to someone wanting to step into these roles. For years my office had a waitlist of hundreds of candidates waiting to be hired, and for the first time, we don’t have one. This is not just a Cook County issue but an issue all across the country.

It is demoralizing for the brave men and women who proudly protect and serve their communities. My staff wants to help their communities be safe places where residents can thrive. When there are calls to end their work or take away their ability to do that, it hurts morale and makes it harder to recruit the next generation of officers.

2. What effects have progressive prosecutors who refuse to enforce the law in Chicago and Cook County had? How has less enforcement against bad actors in Chicago and Cook County affected the law enforcement officers and the citizens in those areas?

As the Sheriff of Cook County, I have an obligation to uphold public safety and we will do that regardless of what is going on in the country. Crime increasing is not limited to only Cook County. Crime is increasing everywhere. I have more Sheriff’s Police officers than I have ever had. Now I am working to maintain those numbers. That is a tremendous task with our recruiting so difficult. As the Sheriff I will continue to uphold my statutory obligation of protecting the citizens of Cook County and work tirelessly to make it a better place to live.

3. What effects have bail reform policies had in Chicago and Cook County?

We have seen more individuals charged with violent offenses ordered to electronic monitoring than in previous years. We have also seen fewer people charged with non-violent offenses ordered held at Cook County Jail.

4. What kinds of trauma response trainings would be beneficial for improving the mental health of your officers?

Many officers don't seek mental health support because they believe the stress comes with the job, and they just need to tough it out. There has been a longstanding stigma around law enforcement officers admitting they need help. This mentality can lead to conditions such as PTSD to go untreated and potentially lead to self-destructive behaviors. More education, compassion, understanding, and training that can reduce the stigma of seeking help, or speaking to a therapist, could help rank-and-file officers as well supervisors.

In my office, I have several different programs to help my staff. I have an Empower program that helps staff feel like they have a voice as well as positively promotes recognition. I have an Early Intervention System that is designed to identify staff that may be experiencing stress, anxiety, and/or depression. The Early Intervention System is designed to help them talk through their issues with staff in a confidential setting. I also have a Peer Support Program that focuses on supporting staff that have already faced some kind of trauma in their life. That could be the death of a loved one, another officer, depression, alcohol or drug abuse, etc. We are always looking for additional solutions and would be open to suggestions that you may have.

5. Of the guns you recover, how many are legally sold and then used in crimes? How many are illegally possessed?

Nearly all firearms our office has recovered started as a legally purchased weapon. In 2021, our office recovered 778 guns. Half of them were either used in crimes or were illegally possessed.

This year through March 23, we have recovered 185 guns, nearly 60 percent of those guns were either illegally possessed or were used in crimes.

6. Which gangs and criminal organizations are the most involved in carjackings?
Many of our offenders have gang affiliations, but we have not identified a clear pattern of one or two gangs dominating the statistics. In fact, what we have seen is the development of prolific crews numbering 10 to 20 members who come together for the express purpose of vehicular hijacking. Some of these crews even contain individuals belonging to opposing gangs. As part of our research, we interview offenders about tactics, techniques, and procedures. We find that most crews are formed around skill sets specific to the crime or neighborhood and family relationships.
7. I have often heard from police officers in certain jurisdictions that it is preferable to take a case involving a serious violent crime or a drug trafficking offense to federal prosecutors rather than state authorities because the alleged criminal will be more likely to be detained pre-trial. Is that accurate?

When the offenses rise to the level of a federal statute, yes, it's preferable to have them charged federally for many reasons, including the increased possibility of being detained pre-trial.