

Prepared Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing with Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Kenneth Polite
Wednesday, August 3, 2022

Our hearing today is on threats against election workers. Threats of violence are never acceptable. Violence is a major problem in America today, with rates of violent crime skyrocketing across the country. Not since the 1990s have we seen these levels of murder, assault, carjacking, robbery, attacks on police, and other violent crimes.

The start of this violent crime wave began in 2020 as police nationwide were pulled off the streets. A study from the Council on Criminal Justice showed that homicides in major American cities in 2021 were 44 percent more than 2019.

So far in 2022, the major cities of Baltimore, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Atlanta, and New York City are already worse than 2021. The baseline is rising. High rates of violent crime are becoming the new norm.

Some of the main causes of this rise in violent crime are anti-police rhetoric and de-policing efforts, progressive prosecution, and bail reform. We talked about the crisis faced by law enforcement officers last week in this Committee in our hearing about attacks on police.

This crisis in policing is happening at the same time that progressive prosecutors refuse to hold violent criminals accountable for their crimes. Witness after witness in this committee has told us the bail reform movement helps to release violent criminals who are arrested so they can go commit more crimes.

A horrible story occurred in Waukesha, Wisconsin, when a man drove into a parade of people, killing 6 people and wounding many more. He was out on bail for a violent crime. He should never have been free in the first place, but a progressive prosecutor and lax laws allowed him to get out and kill all those people.

Research is clear that a huge amount of violent crime in any city is committed by a small number of repeat offenders. If police and prosecutors can focus on those offenders, they can improve the situation significantly.

But because of difficulties at the state level in terms of understaffed police departments, progressive prosecutors who turn a blind eye to violent crime, and state legislatures who soften criminal laws and implement bail reform, states are not solving this problem, nor are they able to do it alone. Federal support is necessary.

Congress must treat violent crime as a very top priority. For this reason, last week, I introduced the [*Combating Violent and Dangerous Crime Act*](#). The bill contains common sense proposals to reduce the spike in violent crime in the nation: proposals that would expand federal prosecution options for

offenses like murder, carjacking, bank robbery, and assault on police officers. All of my fellow Republicans on this Committee have co-sponsored this bill, and I thank them for their work on this.

The Department of Justice should also be treating violent crime as a top priority. But that's not what we're seeing from the Biden DOJ.

In the summer of 2020, under the Trump Administration, the DOJ conducted Operation Legend, which was targeted toward prosecuting violent criminals in the places in America that had the worst rates of violent crime. This effort was a supplement to the overstretched state and local law enforcement and court systems which simply could not deal with the surge in violence they were seeing.

But whenever a question about violent crime comes up, the Biden DOJ only wants to talk about gun control, not about punishing criminals who commit violence. I wrote a [letter to the DOJ](#) on February 14, 2022 to ask the DOJ to answer for its misguided and politicized approach to law enforcement.

Now, more than a year ago, the DOJ formed a task force on threats to election workers. It appears that only four cases have been announced as a result of this task force's efforts, after more than a year's work. *Four*. And there have been no charged acts of violence against election workers. These prosecutions may be worthy, but the existence of a full DOJ task force is confusing. Compare this to Operation Legend, which resulted in about 1,500 federal prosecutions for crimes involving drugs, guns, and violence. All that in less than 6 months.

In light of Attorney General Garland's past focus on intimidating parents who were concerned about school boards, I fear that there is a political element to the decision to focus in this area. The Biden Administration doesn't want to talk about the failed policies of Democratic cities. But a law enforcement agency like the Department of Justice should not be participating in politics.

DOJ is the highest law enforcement agency in America. It must focus its priorities on the challenges facing Americans today—that means addressing violent crime. If we can only reduce the homicide numbers to where they were before the "defund the police" movement, we could save as many as 6 thousand lives per year.

Yet there is no murder surge task force. No task force for combating the 20 year high in police killings. No carjacking task force. Certainly no task force for the threats and arsons against crisis pregnancy centers and churches in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision.

DOJ is not choosing what to convene task forces on by the level of violence. They're choosing by the political message. And that will have real consequences for the safety, and the lives, of many Americans.

