

Chairman Van Drew, Ranking Member Crockett, and other members of the House: I am honored for the opportunity to talk with you today about our nation's crime trends and how we can potentially drive them lower.

My name is Jeff Asher, and I am a crime data expert. I have worked as an analyst over the last 18 years for the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, New Orleans Police Department, and Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office. In my role as the co-founder of AH Datalytics, I have created a project called the Real-Time Crime Index (or RTCI) which gathers crime data from more than five hundred agencies nationwide to estimate national crime trends as they occur.

I am here today to discuss the data which shows a sharp decline in murder and violent crime in America over the last few years. Acknowledging this fact does not deny the seriousness of these problems nor does it imply that they are solved. Even the lowest US murder rate ever recorded means there were still 14,000 or so tragedies like the awful murder that brought you all to North Carolina today.

Here is what the data unequivocally tells us about our nation's crime trends:

Murder in the United States fell at the fastest rate ever recorded by the FBI in both 2023 and 2024 on the heels of by far the largest one-year increase ever recorded in 2020. For 2025, the RTCI sample of 562 agencies covering 116 million people shows murder is down 20 percent nationally through July, setting up the third straight year with a record decline.

Many cities are seeing historic lows in terms of murder.

Baltimore and Detroit had the fewest murders through August since 1965, Philadelphia since 1966, and New Orleans since 1970 despite the horrific terrorist attack on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Chicago and New York City had the fewest shooting victims through August this year that either city has recorded in the few decades they have been tracking shootings. Los Angeles had the fewest murders through June since 1966, and San Francisco had the fewest murders through August since at least before 1960.

The FBI has been estimating national crime rates since 1960 and, tallying it all up with this year's decline, points to the strong likelihood that the FBI will report the lowest murder rate it has ever recorded in the United States. That works out to roughly 8,000 fewer people murdered nationally this year than in both 2020 and 2021, a remarkable decline.

And it is not just murder that is falling.

Overall, reported violent and property crime are both down double-digit percentage points in the RTCI. The United States reported violent crime rate in 2025 will likely be the lowest

reported by the FBI since 1968 and the nation's reported property crime rate will likely be the lowest on record.

Violent crime in general and murder specifically rose in North Carolina in 2020, peaked in 2021 and have been declining ever since. North Carolina was one of 44 states in 2024 to report a drop in murder, according to the FBI.

Charlotte's trends are closely conforming to both national and statewide trends having seen murder increase from 68 per year on average between 2015 and 2018 to 117 in 2020. Murder is down 8% statewide per the RTCI and down 25% in Charlotte this year as the city has had the fewest murders year-to-date since 2018. Violent crime in North Carolina is down 15% statewide and down 21% in Charlotte through July per the RTCI. Despite falling in the last few years, statewide violent crime and murder remain elevated relative to the mid-2010 lows, though well below where they stood in the mid-1990s.

Ultimately, the data is very clear about the direction of crime in the United States right now, but explaining why it is falling is both quite challenging and essential to ensuring future reduction. Any explanation must account for at least six factors:

- 1) The declines are occurring nearly everywhere in the United States with drops in every category of crime in all 11 population groups measured by the FBI in 2024.
- 2) The declines began in 2023 and have accelerated in the last two years, suggesting the main causes are rooted in investments begun in the 2021 and 2022 timeframe.
- 3) Most medium and large cities have fewer police officers today than they had when murder began spiking.
- 4) We have not fixed the supposed root causes of crime such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities.
- 5) The nation has more guns now than ever before.
- 6) Clearance rates for most crimes remain low by historical standards.

Acknowledging what is borne out in the data – a historic drop in murder and other reported crime – presents a golden opportunity to better understand why this is happening. The critical task now is to understand what is driving our crime trends down so that policymakers at the local, state, and national levels can have the tools to better bring about falling crime everywhere and sustain these historic lows into the future.

Thank you.

As to why murder may be falling so dramatically, murder rose at the fastest rate ever recorded in 2020 in the United States and largely stayed at that elevated level in 2021 and 2022. Since then, however, murder has been falling at the fastest rate ever recorded.

It fell 12 percent in 2023 according to data from the FBI and it likely fell even faster in 2024 according to a variety of sources. Murder was down 14.6 percent in a sample of more than 400 cities and counties in the Real-Time Crime Index (RTCI), shootings fell 13 percent in the Gun Violence Archive, and homicides were down around 12 percent through last October according to preliminary data from the Center for Disease Control's WONDER database.

The early data for 2025 is even more encouraging.

Data from the RTCI points to a double-digit percentage point drop in every category of crime through March 2025 including a 20+ percent decline in murder, and shootings are down 17 percent in the Gun Violence Archive through May. All told, murder is falling a lot in 26 of the country's 30 most murderous cities so far in 2025. Detroit, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Baltimore each reported fewer murders through May than any year since the 1960s, and New York City reported the fewest murders ever reported through May 2025.

There are undoubtedly many factors contributing to the multi-year decline in crime we are experiencing, and it will be a while before the impact of these factors in reducing crime is truly understood. The complexity of these factors means that the ideas I'm espousing here may only explain a small portion of the decline and I wouldn't discount other factors — like the ones Charles Lehman recently laid out — as contributing as well. I'm a smart enough analyst to know that my preferred explanation is not the only explanation.

Nobody knows for sure exactly why murder is falling so fast right now, a fact that is important to remember when reading this analysis as well as any other on the topic. Any explanation of why murder is falling at a historic clip must contend with several known facts:

The decline began in 2023 and has been remarkably steady, so the roots of the decline are probably things that happened in 2021, 2022 and 2023 rather than things that started in 2024 or 2025.

There are fewer police officers in most big and medium-sized cities now than there were 2 or 3 years ago (and way fewer compared to pre-COVID).

There are still substantially more guns in the United States now than at any point in our nation's history.

The decline in murder is national in scale. Most (but not all) cities are moving in the same direction, so it's probably not caused by that one unique local program your city launched last year or by a poorly defined idea like 'hard work'.

Clearance rates have improved since 2020 but are still really low by historical standards. The national murder clearance rate in 2023 (57.8 percent) was the third lowest ever recorded (behind 2020 and 2022) and the violent crime clearance rate in cities was essentially unchanged in 2023 compared to 2020 (39.9 percent vs 39.5 percent respectively).

And, finally, the big, structural root causes of gun violence are largely unchanged.

It is also helpful to acknowledge that the factors driving murder down now are almost certainly not the same factors that drove murder up in 2020.

With all of those caveats in mind, when I think about the main factors behind declining murder, a strong investment in communities from private and public sources after the shock of the pandemic stands out as a major cause. There is a wide array of types of support that I would put into the "community investment" basket, including jobs, infrastructure, and programming, but it could be summed up as "we spent a lot of money everywhere on stuff."

Overall, this is the explanation that I find most satisfying in light of the preconditions discussed above. And I'm not alone in this line of thinking.

John Roman has argued that local government returning to normal was essential for enabling government services to assist citizens. Roman also points to research showing a clear causal effect between nonprofit organizations working in communities and decreasing crime.

The government's inability to support communities like normal in 2020 and 2021 may have deepened and prolonged the surge in violence that began in mid-2020 for completely different reasons. By contrast, increased government support could have helped interrupt those cycles of violence, created jobs, and even potentially enabled more efficient policing despite less staffing at agencies.

All of this support was disrupted due to the pandemic when we needed it and it all came roaring back (and then some) in the last few years during the Great Murder Decline.

It's difficult to measure the exact role that increased levels of community investment may have had in reducing violence in the United States. It's easier to conceptualize how it could be a major factor though. I couldn't help but think about the potential role these

investments may have played while reading Jens Ludwig's excellent new book. Ludwig writes (emphasis mine):

“For starters, we have RCTs (Randomized Controlled Trials) of policies that try to strengthen social control in communities. These policies try to get more eyes on the streets by cleaning up vacant lots, fixing up abandoned buildings, improving street lighting, opening more stores, or even hiring private unarmed security guards. Conventional wisdom predicts these policies shouldn't really matter much for gun violence; few of them have anything to do with increasing the chances (or severity) of punishment, and none of them is about ending big, structural root causes like poverty or segregation or social isolation. Yet these different aspects of social control are all still situational factors in their own right as well — they're just easier to change than things like poverty and segregation. While conventional wisdom claims these policies shouldn't matter, the RCTs show that each of these policies can help prevent violence from happening in the first place.”

It is very easy to see evidence for increased investment in communities in a host of data sources. Employment in local and state government plunged during COVID, but employment picked up considerable steam between 2022 and 2024.

Local and state government tax receipts also increased 33 percent between the end of 2019 and the end of 2024 highlighting that communities had more funding available to do stuff with. And retail sales grew at a much faster rate after the shock of COVID compared to before.

Communities didn't just hire more people and have more money to spend, they put those things together to fix roads and build new facilities aimed at supporting their populations and increasing public safety. Local and state government construction on streets and highways increased by nearly 40 percent between 2019 and 2024, by 88 percent on police and sheriffs, by nearly 70 percent on lighting, and by more than 110 percent on neighborhood centers according to data from the Department of Transportation.

Finally, the Department of Justice's main grant making arm – the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) increased grant funds allocated from 3.26 billion dollars in FY 2021 to 4.5 billion dollars in FY 2023. These were targeted programs aimed specifically at reducing violence, increasing analytic capacity, and improving public safety overall.

The historic decline in murder should be expected to flatten out eventually, so seeing steps back from the community investments that potentially helped fuel murder's drop is worrisome.

The future of government spending is uncertain to say the least and government employment at the state and federal level is either flatlining or falling. Construction

spending on public safety and highways began to plateau in 2024 after huge increases since 2022. And a decline in OJP grantmaking in 2024 was followed by DOJ canceling around \$500 million dollars from more than 370 grants – primarily from OJP — per an excellent analysis from the Council on Criminal Justice.

These grants covered community violence interruption programs, technical assistance to law enforcement through Project Safe Neighborhoods, a program designed to reduce rural violent crime and support rural law enforcement called the Rural Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, and much more across 37 states.

The decline that began in 2023 will end at some point. Nobody can say whether that will be in 6 months or 6 years, but the decline will most likely either level off or reverse at some point down the line just as it always does.

Crime trends tend to change slowly for complex reasons, so declining government spending and support is unlikely to be singularly responsible for crime suddenly rising nationwide. The factors that caused the Great Murder Decline will probably not be the same factors that cause things to go up when they inevitably do. But crime is dropping at an enormously fast rate, and if/when those trends start to turn around though then many of the tools that likely helped arrest and then reverse the increase last time may not be available.