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Let's invest in criminal justice

Indianapolis has spent more than \$2 billion on worthy civic projects such as the new airport terminal, Lucas Oil Stadium, and a new Central Library. The same sense of civic pride must be mobilized for funding improved criminal justice.



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Commentary

Strong, coherent mayoral leadership is required to address the causes of increased criminal activity here, but a lasting solution requires a community-wide effort.

Criminal activity is not simply the result of an individual's motivation to offend. For crime to occur, the conditions also have to be right. Because an individual's participation in and circumstances surrounding his or her crime are unique, no single method exists for reducing crime. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the mayor to mobilize the community resources necessary to examine the potential causes, identify solutions, and monitor the effectiveness of those solutions.

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department provides a framework for effective policing. The police chief now has clear lines of authority and responsibility. As the unification of the old departments continues, the mayor needs to ensure that departmental efforts are coordinated and that staffing, training, equipment and funding are sufficient for officers to do their jobs.

Indianapolis needs to recruit more exemplary men and women as patrol officers. More officers patrolling Indianapolis neighborhoods reduces the likelihood of crime. However, more officers apprehending criminals will not solve the problem if we don't also have more prosecutors, judges, courtrooms, jails and probation officers who can address the influx of people into the system.

The police and the public need to have confidence that, if criminals are apprehended, the criminal justice system will function efficiently. For example, jail-capacity constraints force prosecutors and judges to make difficult decisions regarding incarceration of suspects and criminals. And the Probation Department is not fully staffed and equipped to aid the reintegration of those who have fulfilled their debt to society. Mayor Ballard's Re-Entry Employment Fair provided some help to those re-entering society, and it meets one of the objectives of Mayor Peterson's Community Crime Prevention Task Force.

In 2006, Indianapolis confronted a significant increase in criminal activity. In response, Mayor Bart Peterson convened the Community Crime Prevention Task Force. Over several months, a diverse group of community leaders searched for solutions to reduce violence. The task force recommended actions in the following areas:

- ex-offender re-entry programs and training,
- effective use of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership,
- expanded substance abuse and mental health services,

■ improved child abuse and domestic violence services and resources,

■ continued neighborhood involvement,

■ coordination of mentoring programs for youth, particularly at-risk youth,

■ educational excellence,

■ programs for at-risk youth.

In addition to these areas of investment, the metropolitan region needs a functioning mass-transit system that provides regular, affordable, efficient transportation from residential areas to commercial and industrial areas. Adults and youth with access to reliable transportation are more likely to find and hold a job, thereby aiding them in becoming productive, contributing members of society once they re-enter the work force and further reducing their likelihood of recidivism.

Mayor Ballard has plenty of recommendations on how to address the latest challenge to the safety of the citizens of Indianapolis and he has the standing to convene the necessary parties whose support would be required. However, to adequately address the safety of the city, as well as meet other municipal obligations, the mayor also may need to rally the city behind the issue, establish the budget priorities to identify the resources necessary, and work to protect the reputation of Indianapolis as a safe and clean city in which to grow a business and raise a family. •

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