

**REPORT OF THE
VIRGINIA STATE CRIME COMMISSION**

"HOTSPOT" COMMUNITIES

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 95

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2000**



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

VIRGINIA STATE CRIME COMMISSION

Senator Ken Stolle
Chairman

Rich Savage
Director

January 10, 2000

To: The Honorable James S. Gilmore, III
Members of the Virginia General Assembly

House Joint Resolution 503 agreed to by the 1999 General Assembly, directed the Virginia State Crime Commission to conduct a study on "Hotspot" Communities" and to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Members of the 2000 Session of the General Assembly.

In fulfilling this directive, a study was conducted by the Virginia State Crime Commission in 1999. I have the honor of submitting herewith the study report.

Respectively submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Stolle", written over a horizontal line.

Kenneth W. Stolle
Chairman

KWS:sr

VIRGINIA STATE CRIME COMMISSION
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The Honorable William G. Petty

Attorney General's Office

The Honorable Mark L. Earley

Executive Summary



Virginia State Crime Commission

House Joint Resolution 503 "HotSpot" Communities

January 2000

In 1999, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution 503 (Appendix A) directing the Virginia State Crime Commission to do a study of Maryland's "HotSpot" Communities initiative. The study evolved due to legislative questions regarding the applicability of such a program in Virginia.

Findings

The Crime Commission found:

- The Maryland initiative is in 35 communities all of which had high crime rates prior to the initiative.
- Maryland will allocate \$10.5 million in state and federal funds over the next three years to the communities for

collaborative crime control and prevention plans.

- Virginia has had several state or federal initiatives similar to "HotSpot" Communities in recent years including, Anti-Crime Partnerships, Weed and Seed Programs and the New Partnership Commission.
- Some Virginia localities are currently initiating similar coordinated crime control programs, including the City of Richmond's "Blitz to Bloom" project.
- There are several other similar initiatives in other states, which could also be effective in Virginia.

Recommendation

Based on these findings, the Crime Commission recommended:

- The Virginia State Crime Commission continues to examine the potential applicability of a "HotSpot" Communities model as part of the Senate Joint Resolution 240 Study of Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering.

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Authority for Study

The 1999 General Assembly approved House Joint Resolution 503 sponsored by Delegate Alan A. Diamonstein directing the Crime Commission to study the issue of the “HotSpot” Communities initiative in Maryland.

Virginia Code §9-125 establishes the Virginia State Crime Commission and provides that the Commission is to “study, report and make recommendations on all areas of public safety and protection.” Furthermore, pursuant to Virginia Code §9-127, the Commission “shall have the duty and power to make studies and to gather information and data in order to accomplish its purposes.” With respect to the performance of the functions, duties and powers enumerated to the Commission, Virginia Code §9-134 provides that the Commission shall be authorized to maintain offices, hold meetings and functions, conduct private and public hearings, and designate a member of the Commission to preside over such hearings. The Virginia State Crime Commission, in fulfilling its legislative mandate, undertook the study of courtroom security in Domestic Relations cases.

Report Organization

The remaining sections of this report present the results of the Virginia State Crime Commission’s analysis of the applicability of a “HotSpots” Communities initiative in Virginia. Section II presents the Study Design, Section III presents background information and the report’s findings are discussed in Section IV. Finally, the report’s recommendations are in Section V and acknowledgements are contained in Section VI.

Study Design

Crime Commission staff undertook three separate research activities to address the study mandate.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with local officials, local agencies, representatives of civic and religious organizations, and representatives from local nonprofit organization to determine their views on the necessity and applicability of a “HotSpots” Communities initiative in Virginia.

Site Visits. Staff visited several of the “HotSpots” communities in Maryland to see how the programs worked there. Visits were also made to other similar Virginia programs, such as the Weed and Seed program and the “Blitz to Bloom” program in the City of Richmond.

Documents Review. Staff reviewed research materials on other states’ programs that are similar to “HotSpot” Communities initiative, including available evaluative data on community impact and crime reduction. The review included materials on programs in Virginia.



Initiative Description

The “HotSpots” Communities initiative is a coordinated State effort in Maryland, which assists 35 select communities in reducing neighborhood decline and violence by supporting crime control and prevention strategies, in a partnership with local government and citizens. The program provides an array of enforcement and prevention resources that are supported by \$10.5 million in state and federal grants over the next three years. The objectives of “HotSpots” Communities are to reduce crime in a community by 25% to 35% over the three-year period and to significantly reduce the fear of crime in the community.¹

The “HotSpots” Community program is coordinated through local teams representing: the police and/or sheriff’s department, the probation offices for adult and juvenile offenders, the victim-witness program, the prosecutor’s office, and other community programs as the localities deems appropriate.

The Maryland initiative has six core elements.

- *Community Mobilization.* “HotSpots” is directed at organizing community residents to mobilize efforts against crime. This element seeks to utilize civic and religious groups to reclaim public space through activities such as neighborhood watch. The efforts are carried out in close cooperation with police and other government agencies.
- *Community Policing.* Community policing is an important strategy used in the program that includes intensive police patrols, undercover drug investigations and undercover gun investigations. Formal and informal communication between police and the community is achieved through a special officer assigned to the neighborhood for problem solving, crime prevention, enforcing quality of life offenses and building police-citizen trust.
- *Community Probation.* The Maryland initiative includes an element of community probation services, that provides intensive supervision of known adult and juvenile offenders on probation or parole. The probation and parole officers are based in the community and manage neighborhood caseloads. These officers also maintain both formal and informal communication with the community.
- *Community Maintenance.* The community maintenance component is directed towards providing a rapid response to rundown houses, abandoned cars, littered lots, and other public nuisances that lead to neighborhood

¹ Source: Cabinet Council on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, State of Maryland information, Dec. 1999.

deterioration. Zoning, health and housing codes are strictly enforced. The community is involved in identifying nuisances and monitoring solutions.

- *Youth Prevention.* “HotSpots” provides structured after-school activities to improve risk and resiliency factors. In addition, truancy and curfew ordinances are enforced through a close partnership between the schools and law enforcement.
- *Local Coordination.* The Maryland initiative emphasizes local coordination between community agencies by designating a senior local official to coordinate “HotSpot” activities.

As Exhibit 1 illustrates, the “HotSpots” program also uses six contributing strategies to boost the effectiveness of the core elements or objects.

Exhibit 1

“HotSpot” Contributing Strategies

Community Prosecution. Community prosecution strategies encourage the local prosecutors to serve as problem-solvers in an on-going relationship with the community. The prosecutor seeks input into the prosecution of dangerous offenders and uses available ordinances and codes to remove public nuisances.

Juvenile Intervention. Juvenile offenders are given swift and certain intervention at the first offense. Sanctions emphasize accountability and restitution to victims is sought. There is also increased supervision and support of those youth returning to the community from secure detention facilities.

Environmental Design. Communities are encouraged to use environmental design to improve safety through changes in lighting, fencing, traffic patterns, and other physical conditions that deter crime by controlling access and promoting natural surveillance.

Victim Outreach and Assistance. Victim strategies are encouraged to make victims a central and integral part of the criminal justice process. Financial losses and damages are restored through offender restitution and restorative justice approaches.

Community Support for Recovery. Communities are encouraged to use their network of resources to support drug-addicted residents by including dedicated placements in treatment programs for addicted community residents. In addition, drug-addicted offenders enter court-ordered treatment supported by a system of increasing sanctions for positive urine screens.

Housing and Business Revitalization. Communities are encouraged to access state resources to ensure maximum impact on economic opportunity and physical infrastructure in the community.

Source: Virginia State Crime Commission analysis of Maryland “HotSpots” materials, August 1999.

State and Federal Programs in Virginia

In recent years, Virginia has had several state, federal and local initiatives similar to “HotSpot” Communities. During the Wilder administration the Anti-Crime Partnerships program was initiated. This program focused primarily on providing enhanced law enforcement resources to at-risk neighborhoods with an increased effort to involve the neighborhood residents in the crime control efforts.

The federal Weed and Seed Program was established in the City of Richmond in the early 1990s. The philosophy behind the Weed and Seed Program was to establish neighborhood police precincts in high crime, at-risk communities with foot and bike patrols by police thus, developing ties between the police and the community. This local approach is commonly known as community policing and is the “weed” portion of the federal program. The “seed” side of the program provided an infusion of resources into the community to develop programs for at-risk youth and incentives for community participation in community development programs.

Governor Allen established a new program during his administration that replaced the Anti-Crime Partnerships. This program was a State funded model of the Weed and Seed Program and five pilot localities were selected for assistance: Lynchburg, Norfolk, Petersburg, Portsmouth and Winchester. Currently, the Gilmore administration has established the New Partnership Commission which has been tasked with examining strategies for assisting communities in dealing with drug problems, gangs, school violence and other public safety issues.

Local Initiatives

Virginia localities have developed their own anti-crime initiatives. The City of Richmond has recently initiated a comprehensive community crime control program known as “Blitz to Bloom.” The primary target of this program is to eliminate open-air drug markets. The program uses the following:

- intensive law enforcement efforts “blitz” the community for approximately 30 days;
- intensive building and environmental code enforcement is undertaken for selected blocks;
- community associations, in association with City associations, plan for transition to less intense law enforcement; and
- human service agencies assess community needs and work to apply the appropriate program services for residents.

Identified Need

Community crime control is a concept of mobilizing the community to work collaboratively in an effort to prevent and control criminal activity. There are currently numerous state, federal and local programs used in Virginia that contain many of the same characteristics of the “HotSpot” Communities initiative. However, there are elements of the Maryland initiative that could be beneficial to Virginia particularly the nature of state level coordination that is present with “HotSpot” Communities.



Recommendations

Pursuant to information collected, the Virginia State Crime Commission approved the following recommendation.

Recommendation

The Virginia State Crime Commission continues to examine the collaborative community crime control strategies used in “HotSpot” Communities as part of the Senate Joint Resolution 240 Study of Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering.

Acknowledgements

The members and staff of the Virginia State Crime Commission wish to extend their thanks to the following individuals for their cooperation and assistance with this study:

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Amanda C. Owens

Operation Spotlight: National Center on Institutions and Alternatives

Glen Plutschak

Maryland State Division of Probation and Parole

Baltimore City Police Department

Prince George's County Police Department

Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Department

Greater Hillendale Police Department and Neighborhood Housing Services



Appendix A

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 503

Directing the Virginia State Crime Commission to study "hot spot" communities.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 5, 1999

Agreed to by the Senate, February 18, 1999

WHEREAS, the State of Maryland is currently supporting a program called HotSpot Communities, which is a crime reduction strategy targeting all available resources into certain at-risk neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, in this project, communities are selected by the local officials who are best able to judge their own at-risk areas based on the amount of crime, fear of crime, and the community's ability and willingness to participate; and

WHEREAS, part of this project is funded through federal grant money apportioned according to each community's needs and the strength of its plan; and

WHEREAS, using existing programs more effectively is a major part of the initiative, along with the development of new services; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's communities may be able to benefit from a similar concentration of program services in at-risk and high crime areas; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Virginia State Crime Commission be directed to study "hot spot" communities. Technical assistance shall be provided to the Commission by the Department of Criminal Justice Services.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Commission for this study, upon request.

The Commission shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

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