

# ELEVATE

VOL. 1 ISSUE 2

FALL 2024



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## VANISHING ACT

*Law enforcement's struggle to retain veteran officers amid a new recruit ghost town*

2

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## REBUILDING SAN FRANCISCO

*SFPD's strategy to reclaim safety through innovation*

14

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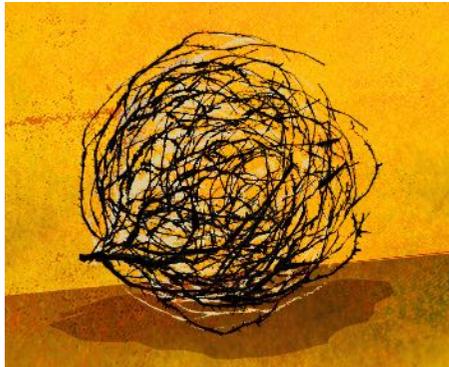
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# ELEVATE

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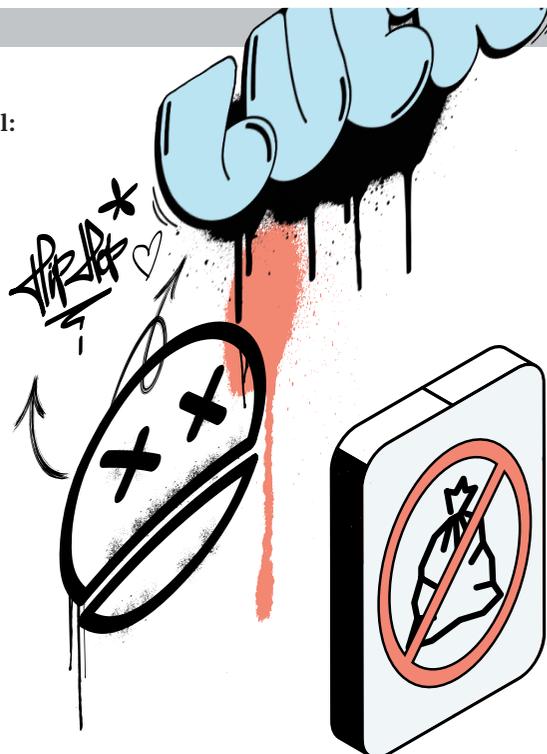


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# Vanishing Act

*Law enforcement's struggle to retain veteran officers amid a new recruit ghost town*

When it comes to recruiting new troopers to Utah's Highway Patrol, the mantra is "One out of 40 ain't bad."

It's the reality for Utah Commissioner of Public Safety Jess Anderson, whose agency is only able to hire one out of every 40 applicants as they try to fill 125 open trooper positions. Astonishingly, that rate is an improvement when just a few years ago, during the height of the pandemic, the ratio was roughly 50:1.

"It comes down to bad decisions that clash with our high standards," said Commissioner Anderson.

Past troubles with the law, drugs, and addiction issues are a few of the reasons applicants are failing background checks and being

BY  
Jared Richardson

denied nationwide. It's even more difficult in Utah where visible tattoos and facial hair beyond a mustache are also immediate disqualifiers for trooper roles.

"Are we missing out on good recruits because of this? Well, if you hire the wrong person because you've lightened the standards, you open yourself to elevated risk."

Why not relax standards? Anderson says recruits with a problematic past are more prone to make the type of mistakes that expose agencies to expensive lawsuits and legal challenges.

"It's my job to protect the state and tax dollars from frivolous lawsuits," he said.

Additionally, Anderson says recruits hired under lax policies rarely pan out.

"The loose standard folks won't make it in the long term and that comes at a significant cost to agencies," he said.

In Utah, for example, Commissioner Anderson says it costs about \$200,000 to recruit, hire, train, and outfit a trooper before they're allowed to go solo on patrol—a process he says takes about a year. And as budgets tighten, Anderson says he can't

take the risk of recruits leaving within the first few years with such a significant investment of time and citizen dollars.

The problem isn't just finding qualified recruits. Anderson says veteran troopers are being lured into the private sector by high-paying jobs while others are seeking significantly less risky roles in law enforcement.

Regardless of where they're working, officers are seeing a disturbing change in how they're being perceived. According to a Gallup poll, 51 percent of Americans have confidence in the police, up 7 percent from 2023. It's even lower among Black Americans, where approval ratings were below 20 percent in 2020, according to Police Chief Magazine. This decline in trust often coincides with high profile cases of excessive use of force, misconduct, and criminal activities.

Utah's Department of Public Safety (DPS) has responded by addressing disparities, bias, and trust in the training required to earn certification.

"We are purposefully policing our own and pulling bad apples out of the barrel, but societal norms have changed," he said. "Criticism of law enforcement has morphed into challenges of authority, non-compliance has

**“The loose standard folks won't make it in the long term.”**

—COMMISSIONER JESS ANDERSON





reducing aggressive homelessness, addressing the fentanyl epidemic, curbing violent crime, and protecting citizens across the state.

“I have to ensure that everyone is safe and can rest at night and they’re not fearful of being harmed. That’s a big lift.”

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Explore the challenges in police recruitment at [elevate.lvt.com/vanishingact](https://elevate.lvt.com/vanishingact)

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increased, and the frequency and intensity of these critical incidents has exponentially gone up in the last few years. It really induces a lot of stress on patrol officers and troopers.”

This added stress is causing its own unique crisis throughout policing. According to a 2021 report published in the National Library of Medicine, law enforcement officers face a 54 percent higher risk of dying by suicide than the general public. A report released in March of 2024 shows that only 17 percent of officers sought help for PTSD and another 7 percent sought help for other mental health issues.

“We’re making sure they have someone to talk to,” said Anderson, whose department recently increased mental health and wellness resources.

These additional resources are part of an aggressive strategy aimed at recruiting and retaining the best troopers. With the help of the legislature, DPS has increased compensation and bonus pay and is offering educational reimbursement, along with career and personal development courses.

Anderson hopes that this will lure more recruits to Utah to help his efforts in



# CASE CRUSADERS

## *Balancing consequences with compassion to reduce crime*

**BY**  
*Noelle Baldwin*

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY**  
*Bradley Slade*

**T**here is no such thing as a victimless crime. Even small crimes can create bigger issues that have a much broader impact.

For example, retail crimes. Theft from a store is often seen as only hurting a corporate monster that can afford to lose a couple hundred dollars. But retailers are the second biggest employer in the United States. In fact, in 2022 the retail sector accounted for more than 55 million jobs and 26 percent of total U.S. employment. Retail is the lifeblood of our communities—it is where we live, work, and shop—so any retail crime will naturally affect more than just the retail company.

That’s why all you have to do to see the effects of this so-called “victimless crime” is to scroll through any news feed. Reports from across the nation show closed stores, increased crime and violence, and decreased prosperity.

But retail theft isn’t where it starts or ends. Instead, it is a result of other circumstances and drivers. As the Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) said, “Retailers recognize that theft and associated violence are often symptoms of larger societal issues like addiction, homelessness, and mental health.”

The cause is a broken society plagued by addiction, mental illness, and opportunistic criminals. It is one where lawlessness and crime are perpetuated because there are no consequences for the bulk of opportunistic offenders.



*ALTO balances the needs of the retailers, law enforcement, district attorneys, and the community to help all parties involved.*

## BRINGING RETAIL CRIME TO COURT

But what can be done to tackle not just the immediate threats, but the forces behind them?

ALTO is a company trying to negate those forces. They partner with businesses, prosecutors, and law enforcement agencies across the country to reduce retail crime and increase community safety through appropriate accountability. Their goal is to improve retail safety by supporting each step of the post-incident process.

It all starts after the arrest. ALTO helps with the entire post-incident process to ensure cases proceed effectively. This includes providing support in the investigation and prosecution, gathering evidence, working closely with retailers' LP/AP teams, and working with local law enforcement and the district attorney's office to enhance collaboration and follow-through.

*“Between  
75 to 85  
percent of  
criminals are  
one and done.”*

—ESTHER ALCARAZ

According to Capital One Shopping, retail stores identify instances of shoplifting only about two percent of the time, significantly hindering efforts to hold repeat offenders accountable. This low detection rate is a critical factor in the broader issue of retail crime, as many cases ultimately face dismissal or stagnation. Factors contributing to this situation include underreporting of incidents, staffing shortages in law enforcement and

district attorney offices, and insufficient courtroom presence from retailers. These interconnected challenges emphasize the urgent need for a more effective system to address retail crime and ensure that offenders face appropriate consequences. Esther Alcaraz, former prosecutor, adjunct professor of criminal justice at Miami Dade College and St. Thomas University, and currently ALTO's Growth and CS Manager, said: “In my experience as a state prosecutor and a retail crime victim advocate, I have observed a significant dismissal rate in cases where retailers fail to appear in court following an apprehension. This lack of engagement indicates a disinterest in pursuing the prosecutorial process, which ultimately undermines efforts to achieve accountability.”

Getting buy-in from the district attorneys, law enforcement agencies, and even the retailers they are representing is critical. Once they buy in, cases are much more likely to go to court and obtain favorable outcomes.

## PROSECUTING SERIAL CRIMINALS WHILE SUPPORTING SECOND CHANCES

Cases like those ALTO advocates for can be divided into several buckets. For example, there are the serial criminals who need to be taken out of play for the safety of the community and those criminals who can change if given the opportunity.

Rhett Asher, the Senior Vice President of Partnership Development at ALTO, said they don't want to put people in jail, but instead want to solve the problem. That's why ALTO not only pushes cases to court but also suggests alternative sentencing when possible. This includes drug rehab, mental illness treatment, home assistance, and more.

ALTO closes 92 percent of their cases favorably with about 30 percent receiving alternative sentencing. "We have received letters, and our clients have received letters from criminals saying thank you. That's because we pushed for that alternative sentencing, and they were able to get the help they needed and turn their life around," said Asher.

"In the cases I supported as a victim advocate for our retail partners in Miami over the past two years, I estimate that between 75 to 85 percent of criminals are one and done," said Alcaraz. "They do their time, they learn, then they never do it again."

That's why ALTO works with local legal experts on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best outcome for the perpetrator, the business they are representing, and the community.

They also encourage early intervention. Of course the sooner they can take the serial criminal out of play, the better it is for the community. But if they can get help to those afflicted with mental illness, drug addiction, or other problems before they become repeat offenders, it is better for that person and society.



*ALTO's proactive, united approach with businesses, citizens, and officials helps prevent crime and protect the community. Because of the increased collaboration, they help build a safer environment.*

## NO CRIME TOO SMALL

ALTO also pushes businesses to report the crime even if it seems small or that nothing ever comes from it. ALTO has been able to connect offenders to other crimes because small events were recorded by retailers.

Reporting also helps police, city officials, and local lawmakers know what is going on. "Unfortunately, silence leads to missed opportunities," said Alcaraz. "A proactive approach is essential; community response is contingent upon effective communication." The key is collaboration between the private and public sectors. It is businesses and citizens working with lawmakers and city officials to support the police, laws, and programs that help the community. Change at the community level will not only help support retailers and other businesses, but also help ensure greater safety for workers and citizens.

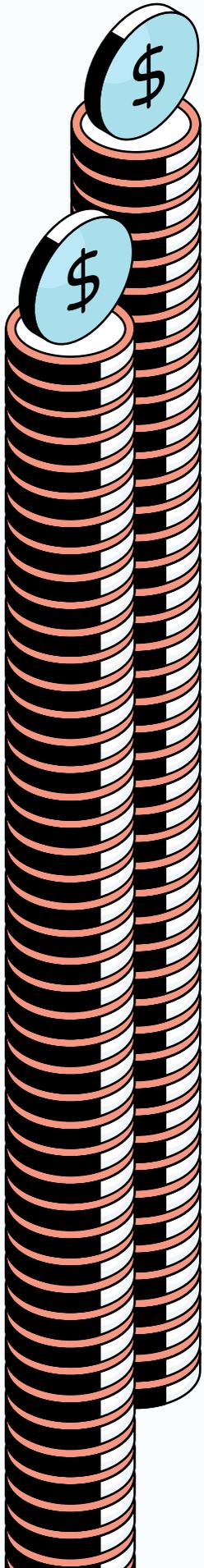
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CRIME'S COST ON  
U.S. TAXPAYERS

# FOOTING THE BILL

There is both a human and a monetary cost when it comes to crime. On top of health risks, environmental damage, cleanup, and maintenance, cities and local governments—and therefore taxpayers—are spending millions to keep their communities clean from illegal dumping, hazardous waste, and vandalism.



2019

**Camden, New Jersey:**

Spent \$4 million to remove 7,000 tons of illegally dumped material

**\$4  
MILLION**

2021

**Flint, Michigan:**

Removed 725 tons of illegally dumped waste



2017

**San Francisco:**

Average cost to clean up illegal dumping was

**\$10million  
PER YEAR**

2023

**Baltimore, Maryland:**

Spent almost \$25 million to curb illegal dumping and vandalism



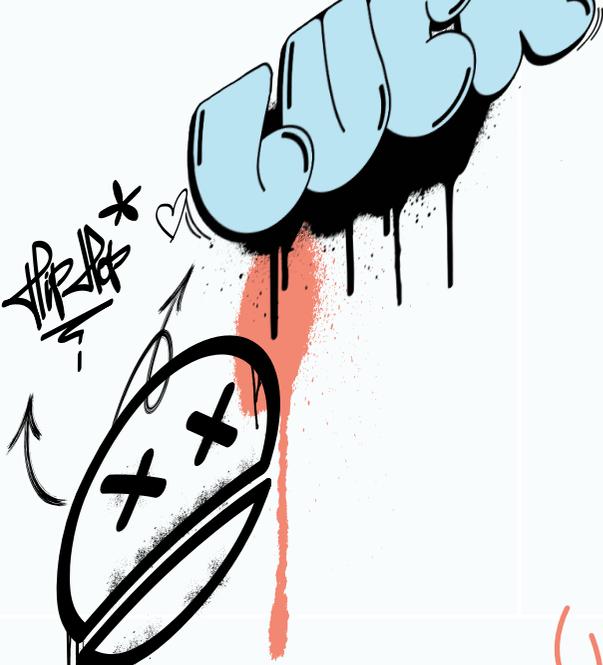
**\$68.5  
MILLION**

**Pennsylvania:**

Spends \$68.5 million annually on illegal dumping costs for nine communities



ELEVATE



vandalism

The price tag of cleaning up graffiti is substantial.

L.A. scrubs away 30 million square feet of graffiti each year, costing the city a minimum of \$7 million per year.

(2015)

National cost of graffiti clean-up:

**OVER \$12 BILLION**

solid waste in encampments



Communities are struggling with how to handle trash and human waste generated by homeless encampments.

In Spokane County, encampments along the I-90 corridor leave behind waste, including needles and drug paraphernalia. The city budget provided \$8 million for cleaning up this waste and other contaminated materials.

(2021-2022)



The cost\* for law enforcement to respond to one property crime:

\*population-weighted average

**\$1,700**

**COST OF POLICE RESPONSE**



**\$26.93 /HR** →

Wage for the lowest-paid officers in Salt Lake City; overtime pay is 1.5x that.

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See how crime impacts taxpayers: [elevate.lvt.com/crimebill](https://elevate.lvt.com/crimebill)



# Thieves Are More Than Fair-Weather Foes

*Protecting critical infrastructure from natural and human threats*

When disaster strikes, leaders who defend the nation's critical infrastructure and people living through disruption must have security plans at the ready. While crews work as fast as possible to get critical infrastructure back online, time is of the essence for business owners and those waiting at home for their utilities. Without access to power, water, or the other daily necessities people need, it's an unfortunate reality that they become potential targets for bad actors.

From looters casing dark retail stores and evacuees' homes to thieves stealing emergency equipment and construction materials necessary for recovery efforts, it's important to take stock of security measures to prepare for—and prevent—the worst in a natural disaster.



To protect the United States' critical infrastructure, from power grids to transportation networks and water systems to telecommunications, **it's imperative security plans are proven and ready.**

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BY  
Meg Moore

## STORMS ARRIVE EARLY AND MORE OFTEN

As Hurricane Beryl, the first Atlantic hurricane of the 2024 season, ripped across the Caribbean, it shredded roads, toppled trees, ravaged downtown storefronts, and deluged entire neighborhoods. It rapidly intensified to a Category 5 storm, long before the traditional start of the hurricane season.

California appeared to flip the weather switch in just a few weeks, tackling spring storms in early May and battling a full-on fire season by the end of June. With more than 106,000 acres already burned in 2024, including the Post Fire in Los Angeles County, the Sites Fire in Northern California, and the Fresno June Lightning Complex Fire, the current tally surpasses the state's first six-month burned area totals in fire records going back to 1972.

"In California, 85 percent of the burned area happens after July 1st," John Abatzoglou, a climatologist and wildfire expert at the University of California at Merced, told The Washington Post.

While large and devastating wildfires have ignited acres of land across the United States this year, even in previously considered low-risk areas, like rainforests and wetlands, other natural disasters loom. The 2024 tornado season is shaping up to be the most active since 2017, floods are wreaking havoc, and derechos are pelting the Great Plains with CD-sized hail and hurricane-force winds.

These increasing weather emergencies make it imperative for leaders to consider the present climate conditions instead of planning for the disasters of the past. Our economy, public safety, and way of life depend on more than officials' astute planning. To protect the United States' critical infrastructure, from power grids to transportation

LIGHTNING COMPLEX  
FRESNO



POST FIRE,  
LA COUNTY



networks and water systems to telecommunications, it's imperative security plans are proven and ready. This requires approved, dedicated emergency resources and personnel in place—and at the ready—to ensure flawless execution when every minute counts.

## EXTREME WEATHER AFFECTS ALL INFRASTRUCTURE

Natural disasters and extreme weather events pose considerable threats to the 16 critical infrastructure sectors, demonstrating an increasing need to improve resiliency. The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency outlines how weather events impact infrastructure:

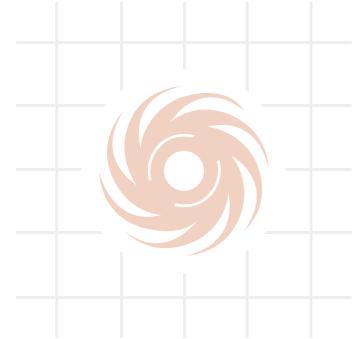
- ▶ **Extended Droughts** Droughts occur more often and their severity can impact the transportation, energy, and water sectors for millions of Americans.
- ▶ **Extreme Heat** As millions discovered this summer, heat events can damage transportation and lead to power outages, which threatens public health.
- ▶ **Wildfires** Fires don't just impact water supply; they can also disrupt transportation, communications, and power and gas services.
- ▶ **Sea Level Rise** Coastal-facing infrastructure networks are located in 23 of the 25 most densely populated and rapidly growing U.S. counties. Intense storms cause prolonged disruption from saltwater contamination to power grid failures.

Weather, wildfires, and solar storms are the top reasons for power outages in the United States, with devastating effects for Americans. When Oregon endured a bad wildfire season, the Oregonian reported that 50,000 residents lost power. Four years later, a winter storm took out power for more than 200,000 in the state. Winter weather wreaks havoc for residents in Tennessee, where 260,000 people lost power in 2021, and 132,000 were in the dark after a 2022 storm.





HURRICANE HARVEY  
HOUSTON



## CONSIDER ALL THE ANGLES THAT COULD PREVENT HELP WHEN NEEDED MOST

Security plans, as well as continuity of operations plans (COOP), to protect our nation’s most vital assets must include the consideration of, and dedicated action, to thwart thieves who strike at vulnerable assets.

Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department and Golden State Water Co. officials are investigating the theft of more than 300 fire hydrants since the start of the year. The city also faces other thefts of infrastructure, including street lamps and electric vehicle charging stations that are likely being sold as scrap metal.

The thefts pose a significant threat to public safety, especially as municipalities are strapped by budgetary concerns.

“Fire hydrants are crucial in providing a reliable water source for firefighting operations, and their absence can hamper rescue efforts and lead to delays extinguishing fires,” the L.A. County Fire Department said in a statement to The Los Angeles Times.

Selling scrap metal is becoming a more common endeavor for thieves, especially as copper prices have surged 20 percent this year, hitting a record high in May 2024. As demand increases for copper wire, used for everything from EVs and their charging stations to power lines, highways and airport runways, thieves are turning the natural transitional metal into one that is as precious as gold.





HURRICANE MICHAEL  
PANAMA CITY



HURRICANE MARIA,  
PUERTO RICO



## CRIMES OF OPPORTUNITY ARE MORE COMMON, BUT PREPARATION FOR ALL SCENARIOS NECESSARY

While these are examples of brazen thefts that can cripple critical infrastructure during normal conditions, security leaders know far too well that criminals capitalize on crimes of opportunity when law enforcement is stretched thin during a crisis. It's more common for thieves to target homes and businesses, as demonstrated by criminals in Houston after Hurricane Harvey and opportunists across Florida after Hurricane Michael and Hurricane Idalia.

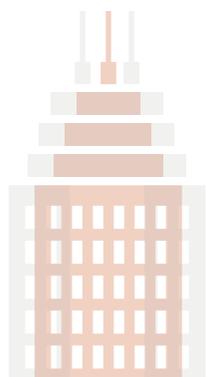
It's imperative to establish perimeters in the hours, days, and weeks after a natural disaster strikes to enable responding agencies to maintain necessary levels of surveillance and security in the event of a disruption of primary systems.

And it's not just businesses or critical infrastructure locations that are targets. In Grants Pass, Oregon, thieves broke into U.S. Forest Service trucks parked in a hotel parking lot and stole crucial firefighting equipment while responders were sleeping for the first time in days. According to police reports, thieves prioritized their wants over the needs of emergency personnel and local residents by making off with Hotshot backpacks, emergency fire shelters, headlamps, compasses, firing sticks, signal mirrors, first aid kits, water bottles, and two STIHL chainsaws.

After Hurricane Maria battered Puerto Rico in 2017, the island's government stored unused emergency supplies in a warehouse. In the aftermath of a 6.4 magnitude earthquake that rocked the territory in 2020, desperate residents broke into the facility to distribute water, cots, and other necessities. While this breakdown isn't a true example of safeguarding critical infrastructure, delivering humanitarian supplies like clean water during a national emergency counts. This story illustrates how proper security plans must encompass logistics, storage, and distribution in times of crisis.



Security leaders know far too well that **criminals capitalize on crimes of opportunity** when law enforcement is stretched thin during a crisis.



6.4 EARTHQUAKE,  
PUERTO RICO



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Read the story online and share at [elevate.lvt.com/disasters](https://elevate.lvt.com/disasters)

## NATURAL DISASTERS PROVIDE COVER

Securing critical infrastructure is a topic of concern and natural disasters can provide cover for thieves. A 2023 assessment by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation highlighted an increase in security incidents impacting electric infrastructure, including ballistic attacks, vandalism, intrusions, and theft. The research reported that threats are made and carried out by both foreign nations and domestic extremists.

“Our nation’s critical infrastructure entities—from schools to hospitals to water facilities—must have the tools and resources to respond to and recover from disruption,” said Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Jen Easterly in a press release. “By taking steps today to prepare for incidents, critical infrastructure, communities, and individuals can be better prepared to recover from the impact of the threats of tomorrow and into the future.”

## DETER AND DEFEND WITH COLLABORATION WITH PRIVATE-SECTOR COMPANIES

Protecting our nation’s most vital assets is not only a concern for the federal government. Creating robust and comprehensive security strategies with mission-specific programmatic capabilities for detection, prevention, mitigation, protection, and coordinated rapid response requires a collaborative approach that involves state and local agencies, partners in the private sector, and community leaders.

By prioritizing investments in infrastructure security and embracing innovation, we can not only defend against thieves, but also build a more resilient, safer, and secure future for all.



# **R**<sup>E</sup>**B**U**I**L**D**ING **S**AN **F**RAN**C**IS**O**



SFPD's strategy to reclaim safety  
through innovation

**A** seismic shift is happening in San Francisco, where efforts are underway to shake out crime in the city’s most dangerous neighborhoods—this after nearly half a decade of restrictive policies and an exodus of officers.

Just as it has done many times in the past, San Francisco is again in a state of rebuilding. According to Ryan Kao, the Crime Strategies Division Director for the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), the agency is reeling from a one-two punch from the COVID-19 pandemic and a nationwide shift in perception of police.

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**BY**  
Noelle Baldwin

“In 2018/2019, our police force was fully staffed. We had full academies four times per year and had to turn people away. But the effects from COVID and the George Floyd protests culminated in an unparalleled staffing crisis,” said Kao. Changes to laws and flagging prosecution were a further impetus, driving more officers away.

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### Increasing crime, decreasing police work

Like any big city, San Francisco attracts crime. According to Kao, in the 2010s the city’s crime level felt manageable despite the lack of access to technology because they had a fully staffed police force. But then in 2020, “There was a concerted effort to reduce the power of police. It was the perfect storm, but now people are realizing that the efforts were likely an overcorrection,” said Kao.

That perfect storm included societal shifts in how people viewed policing, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as local and statewide changes in how crime was prosecuted. Kao said the result was devastating for SFPD which saw more than a quarter of the force leave the job, all while access to police technology was heavily restricted if not outright banned.

“As a result,” said Kao, “we have a confluence of crime going up and policing going down.” This caused many constituents to realize that they may have overcorrected in restricting the police. Now there is rising pressure to increase policing and the prosecution of criminals. Crimes like drug dealing, prostitution, car break-ins, and property crimes increased when the police force and prosecution decreased. In fact in 2022, the conviction rate in San Francisco was 37 percent of cases. After the district attorney was recalled and Brooke Jenkins was appointed as the district attorney, the rate rose to 43 percent, the first time it increased since 2016.

But it’s not an easy fix. According to Kao, it takes two years to recruit and train a new officer for the SFPD, and more realistically, five years before the officer hits their stride in

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**IF I GIVE  
MY COPS THE  
RIGHT TOOLS,  
THAT 10-PERSON  
TEAM CAN DO THE  
WORK OF 20 COPS.**

—RYAN KAO  
Crime Strategies Division Director, SFPD

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# IT TAKES TIME TO REBUILD THAT HOUSE OF TRUST

—RYAN KAO

Crime Strategies Division Director, SFPD

efficiency. But not every officer makes it five years. In 2020, the SFPD had 42 retirements and 57 resignations. And it only increased after that. 105 officers retired and 46 resigned in 2021, and 115 officers retired and 70 resigned in 2022. That's a total of 435 officers in three years.

Being a police officer was once a legacy position—one that ran in families. “Fewer and fewer officers have a family history [with the SFPD]. It's largely just a job now, and a job is only as desirable as its working conditions. People will put up with a lot if you pay them well, but relative to other agencies and industries today, we're not as competitive as we used to be.” said Kao. Also, lucrative positions in the private sector are a greater threat to retention than they used to be.

It doesn't help that police officer recruitment is at an all-time low across the country. According to a Police Executive Research Forum survey, law enforcement recruitment is down 27 to 60 percent depending on the area. Additionally, resignation is up by 18 percent, retirement is up by 45 percent, and four of the largest departments in the country are down 5,400 officers.

## Augmenting with Technology

But as criminals become bolder, communities demand more from their police. “What happens when you shed people but still need the same output?” said Kao. “I've got 10 cops, but I need the output of 20.”

The solution—technology.

“We needed some force multipliers. If I give my cops the right tools, that 10-person team can do the work of 20 cops,” said Kao.

As the Director of the Crime Strategies Division, Kao is responsible for creating and developing crime reduction strategies. This includes finding and implementing new technologies for the department and tracking statistics.

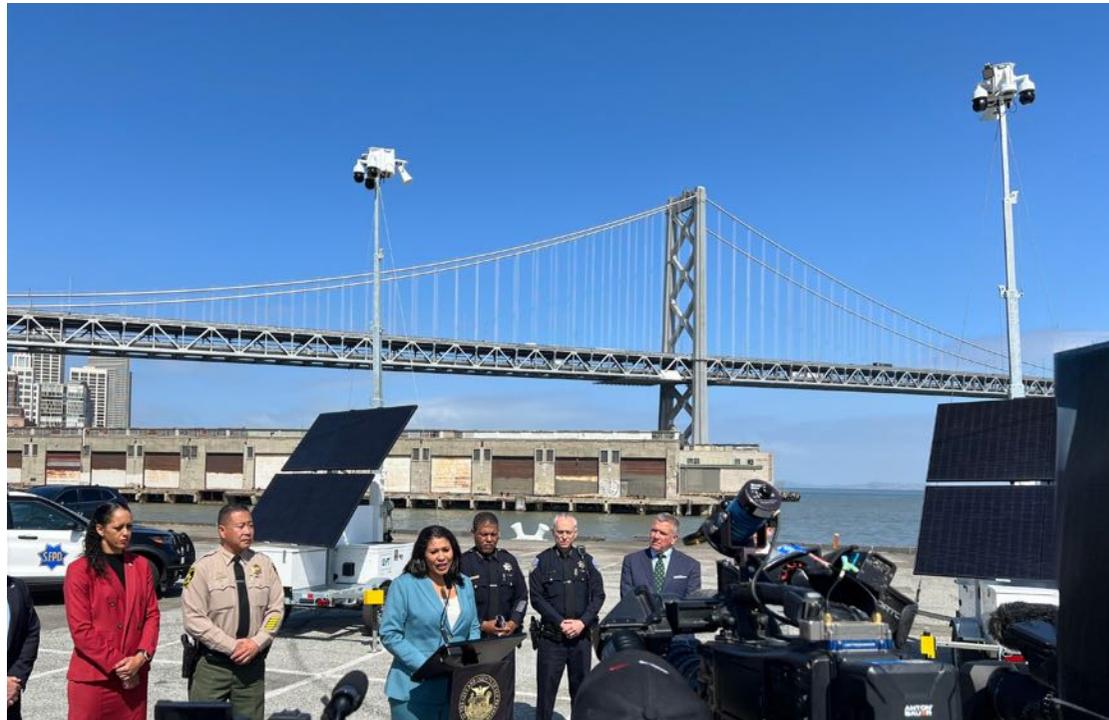


The department has deployed fixed security cameras, drones, and other security solutions. Recently, Mayor London Breed announced a new partnership between the city's law enforcement and LiveView Technologies (LVT) to deploy mobile security units in crime hot spots like the Tenderloin. In fact, thanks to the new technologies, the SFPD recently apprehended a 23-year-old suspect after they stole more than \$2,500 in merchandise from a local Walgreens. The SFPD used footage from the mobile security units and other public safety cameras to identify the suspect before deploying a drone to help officers pursue them. The suspect was booked in the county jail and charged with second-degree burglary, grand theft, organized retail theft, and resisting arrest.

“Our work around public safety is making a difference, but we've got more work to do,” said Mayor Breed. “We are not letting up on our efforts to make San Francisco a safer and enjoyable city for everyone, and this includes continuing to ramp up police staffing and giving our local enforcement agencies the resources they need to do their job.”

According to Kao, officers are loving the new technology. For example, the automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras currently have about a 70 percent adoption rate among officers. The cameras are stationed around the city and help direct officers during an incident. “Criminals may be able to outrun a police officer but they can't outrun a radio. We can't have officers everywhere, all at once, but if we know roughly where the criminal is, our officers can use their traditional police skills to go find them and arrest them,” said Kao.

It's not just criminals that are taking notice of this new investment. Adding technology helps bring in new officers and retain the current ones. “People are happy and feel valued if they have the tools,” said Kao. “It shows that you are willing to trust your officers.”



San Francisco Mayor London Breed (center) along with District Attorney Brooke Jenkins, Sheriff Paul Miyamoto, Police Chief Bill Scott, and others, announce a partnership with LVT, one of the technology solutions the SFPD can use to augment their officers.

It also shows you are willing to invest in their success. The lengthy process to procure any technology for a government agency requires people like Kao and his staff to jump through a lot of hoops. The officers and recruits recognize how hard the process is and see it as the department’s commitment to them. “Not only do you keep your officers, but they help bring in more people. Happy employees are your best recruiters,” said Kao.

Other police departments in the area like the technology too. “Crime is regional. If I can close a case in San Francisco, they can’t continue to Oakland to commit another crime. Criminals don’t care about county lines,” said Kao. It’s a win-win for everyone involved. The SFPD does their job successfully and the bad guy ends up behind bars. It helps secure their city and make it safer for residents, as well as helping the Oakland Police Department succeed and make their city safer too.

### Deciding on Technology

The tech landscape for law enforcement has exploded in recent years. With hundreds of potential solutions and choices, it helps to be a

student. Kao carefully examines each potential technology, looking only to implement those that are truly multipurpose. “I want the cutting board and the chef’s knife of technology, not just the apple corer,” he said. “If the tech hits multiple efforts, I haven’t bought one tool for my officers, I’ve bought two.”

Any new investment also has to help communicate to the citizens of San Francisco that the agency is prioritizing their safety while balancing concerns over privacy. “Balance means responsible and effective use of technology,” said Kao. “We show our citizens what that balance means by using technology responsibly, catching bad guys, and putting the right people in jail.”

The ultimate goal of technology is to make the city safer. “As you make crime harder to do and get away with, there will be less of it,” said Kao. “People are still jaded against police and technology, but they are opening up. It takes time to rebuild that house of trust, but we’re enforcing the law again and overall people are responding positively.”

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# A CASE OF THE BLUES

## THE 6 MOST URGENT CHALLENGES IN POLICING

BY  
MEG MOORE

"Those computer guys were doing their jobs and made mistakes because we're all human. Their names won't be out there, but ours will. And they won't go to jail, *but we could.*"

—SGT. COLIN MCCABE

It's hard out there for police officers. And with ongoing staffing shortages, it's only getting more difficult.

In Police1.com's 2023 survey to gauge police officers' sentiments about the challenges they face, respondents voiced serious concerns about:

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» Recruitment and retention	48%
» Risk of prosecution for on-duty actions	21%
» Officer wellness and morale	17%
» Media coverage of police issues	7%
» Crime spikes	4%
» Ambush attacks	3%

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It's an ongoing struggle, as the challenges remained the same from its 2022 poll. While respondents' concerns about staffing decreased by 4 percentage points in its most recent survey, officers' fears of prosecution increased by the same number, and the need to address wellness and morale issues increased by 2 percentage points.

But there's a reason recruitment and retention topped the list by a wide margin.

"Recruitment and retention have a trickle-down effect because staffing affects absolutely everything we do," Warren Police Department Sergeant Colin McCabe said. "And now our residents are taking notice. Our run times are longer, and they are definitely not used to that."

Sgt. McCabe echoed the respondents' sentiments from Police1.com's survey. He said his experience working for Michigan's third-largest city's police force mirrors the national poll, and he believes addressing staffing challenges will help alleviate the other concerns over time.

But time is of the essence.

"We went from having public discourse about defunding the police just a few years ago to public officials waking up to the fact their workforce is leaving," Chuck Wexler, executive director of PERF, a nonprofit policing think tank based in Washington, D.C., told the Associated Press. "I don't think there's any question that there has been a sea change among political leaders."

Here are police officers' concerns, explained:

## 1 Recruiting and retaining police officers

In 2008, the Warren Police Department hired just 5 percent of those who passed the interview phase, and its hiring list included more than 100 people who were eligible for two years. Fast-forward to 2024, and the numbers tell a much different story—one that is repeated throughout most police departments in the United States: There aren't enough people applying to become officers. In Warren PD's most recent hiring round, the number of qualified applicants who made the hiring list decreased by 97 percent.

Currently, the department's staffing levels are down 10 percent. Knowing that it's impossible to address that gap immediately, the union believes adding a drop plan is one approach that can help alleviate the officer shortage. Leaders believe this will help give officials the time they need to reach full capacity, which, given current hiring challenges, could take up to four years.

"The times of having to apply at 50 departments to try and get in the door is over, at least right now," said Sgt. McCabe, who also serves as the Warren Police Command Officers Association President. "We have seven people on our hiring list—and the best candidates, the people who are ranked No. 1 and No. 2, they're also on other department's lists. These are competitive candidates, and most likely, they'll get to choose where they want to go. That was not my experience."

## 2 Fearing possible prosecution for actions in the line of duty

Sgt. McCabe said most officers go into police work because they want to help and make a difference in their communities. But if an officer makes an honest mistake, many people outside law enforcement rush to judgment—and call for jail time.

"I think it's in the back of everyone's minds," Sgt. McCabe said. "Nobody feels good about making mistakes, especially when they could impact other people, but when everyone has an opinion before we can even start our preliminary investigation, it wears you down."

He compared it to CrowdStrike's software update. The flawed deployment ultimately triggered the largest global information technology outage in history.

"Good faith mistakes do happen, but nobody wants to hear that," Sgt. McCabe said. "Those computer guys were doing their jobs and made mistakes because we're all human. Their names won't be out there, but ours will. And they won't go to jail, but we could."

"And that definitely affects our ability to recruit new police officers," he said.



### 3 Establishing programs to increase mental health awareness, officer wellness, and morale

Sgt. McCabe said difficulties in recruiting and retaining officers go hand in hand with the pressing need for increasing officer wellness programs, not to mention overall morale.

“Because we’re down 25 officers, people have numerous opportunities for overtime. It’s good money of course, but constantly working all kinds of shifts gets old,” he said. “Officers are tired, they get worn out, and it shows. There’s just no way it can’t take a toll on morale.”

Warren PD is making a serious commitment to addressing its officers’ wellness. It is only one of three departments in Michigan with a full-time peer-support wellness program (the other two are Wayne State University Police and the Grand Rapids Police Department), and Sgt. McCabe sees how it makes a difference for officers.

“Because it’s run by our peers—and mandatory for certain events—it takes the pressure, or spotlight, off of people. The program adheres to critical incident debriefing, and you don’t have to speak, but you have the opportunity,” he said. “And if you need it for anything else, whether it be a radio run that you didn’t like, or if you’re going through a divorce, or you’re having financial problems, you can reach out.”

Sgt. McCabe said he’d like to see more departments implement peer-support programs based on FST5, or Frontline Strong Together, Wayne State’s first responder program for police, fire, emergency services, dispatchers, corrections, and their families.

“Over the events of the past few years, it’s become apparent that police officers need access to this,” he said. “It’s important for them.”

### 4 Pushing for accurate and balanced media coverage

Sgt. McCabe recognizes the wide differences between media outlets and reporters and editors’ varied approaches to newsgathering.

That said, he believes police department leaders would do well by their officers if they started proactively engaging the media, much like the practice of community policing. By reinforcing the fact that an officer’s career choice and their work are valuable, officers can be seen as resources to help tell those stories.

*“It’s an officer’s job to keep people safe.*

*In return, they also want to be safe when they’re at work and when they go home.”*

—SGT. COLIN MCCABE

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## 5 Addressing spikes in crime

Warren, Michigan, hasn't experienced an increase in crime like other U.S. cities. Sgt. McCabe credits the department's overtime details—putting additional officers on the streets during high-call volume periods—as one tactic that addresses staffing shortages and response times and works to deter crime. But he said it's not a long-term solution.

Instead, the real solution lies in addressing recruitment and retention issues, according to Dallas Police Chief Eddie Garcia. When a Dallas City Council member asked him to name the one thing officials could do to reduce violent crime and reverse the city's 13 percent increase in murders in 2023 from the previous year, he answered succinctly.

"Staffing," Chief Garcia said, as reported by the Dallas Observer.

Academic research proves he's right. Morgan Williams, an economist at New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, led a project to determine the effect of adding one officer to patrol a city. Their findings, reported by NPR, revealed that increasing a city's police department staffing by one new officer a year could prevent between 0.06 and 0.1 homicides. For average-sized cities, that translates to hiring between 10 and 17 new police officers to save one life a year, which researchers estimated could cost an additional \$1.3 million to \$2.2 million every year.

## 6 Combatting ambush attacks

Police officers must face the very real scenario of being in the line of fire while in the line of duty, and 2023 earned a dubious distinction: 378 officers shot, the most since the Fraternal Order of Police started keeping records. There is a sliver of a silver lining, as advances in trauma care and anti-ballistic technology have reduced fatalities, but 46 police officers lost their lives last year.

But a new threat is emerging.

"There were 115 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement officers in 2023, which resulted in 138 officers being shot and 20 were killed," National President of the Fraternal Order of Police Patrick Yoes said in a statement.

Yoes' statement implores voters to call on their elected officials and "speak out against the violence against law enforcement officers." He specifically highlights the Protect and Serve Act, introduced in February 2023 to establish a new criminal offense for "knowingly assaulting a law enforcement officer and causing serious bodily injury (or attempting to do so) in circumstances that affect interstate commerce." The bill remains stalled with the House Judiciary Committee.

"It's an officer's job to keep people safe," Sgt. McCabe said. "In return, they also want to be safe when they're at work and when they go home. It's unfortunate we need to train for this scenario. It may affect retention, though people haven't told me that specifically. It's definitely a concern, however."

## Patrol officers need help and more resources

Over the past few years, younger workers have forced corporate leaders to address mental health and wellness—with access to an increasing slate of benefits. Considering the exponentially more intense, emotional, and stressful work environment police officers must operate in, one could argue that officer wellness and morale comprise a component of each of their reported concerns.

But the bottom line is that addressing staffing shortages will deliver the highest return on career investment for police officers and their communities.



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