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Mayor: Parents, community, media need to do more to fix crime issues

Brian Edwards, Montgomery Advertiser Published 2:02 p.m. CT Oct. 12, 2017 | Updated 5:45 p.m. CT Oct. 12, 2017



(Photo: File photo)

Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange didn't mince words when talking about crime in the city, including putting some blame on poor familial support.

Strange spared few as he called out inattentive families, urged the community to be better about reporting incidents and blasted the media for what he said was unfair portrayal of crime in the city.

Perception is not reality, he said, noting that violent crime incidents, as well as overall crime, have trended down this year. Law enforcement officials said the city solves homicides at a rate of about 72 percent — 12 points higher than the national average. Strange also praised the city's gun buyback program for

removing illegal weapons from the streets.

He said that he was fired up Thursday morning because of the recent shooting at a [gas station on Eastern Boulevard \(/story/news/crime/2017/10/09/man-critical-after-gas-station-shooting/746003001/\)](/story/news/crime/2017/10/09/man-critical-after-gas-station-shooting/746003001/), [the death of a boy after smoking spice \(/story/news/2017/09/22/my-babys-gone-mother-mourns-death-student-found-south-court-st/694294001/\)](/story/news/2017/09/22/my-babys-gone-mother-mourns-death-student-found-south-court-st/694294001/) and the news media's portrayal of crime in the city.

"Why didn't the owners or managers call us? Why aren't people asking why their kids are out there?" he asked.

Police were on the scene in less than four minutes when they were eventually called, Strange said, adding they possibly could have prevented violence if they had known earlier.

More: [Video: Man critical after gas station shooting \(/story/news/crime/2017/10/09/man-critical-after-gas-station-shooting/746003001/\)](/story/news/crime/2017/10/09/man-critical-after-gas-station-shooting/746003001/)



A still from video shared to social media of a shooting at a Montgomery gas station Sunday night. (Photo: Contributed)

He also opined on the fact that the mother of the boy who died after smoking spice didn't reach out to the city for help, even though she knew about him doing drugs and associating with the other troubled youth.

"We can't do this job by ourselves," Strange said. Families that know their children are involved in criminal activity are also to blame, he said earlier Thursday morning. "If parents aren't going to help, then we have a burden."

He said the established media and social media often focus too much on the negative aspects of crime in the city, creating a perception that crime is actually rising when it isn't.

Still, the mayor acknowledged that Montgomery has work to do, especially in treating the underlying mental health issues as well as drug and alcohol abuse that are often connected to criminality.

More: [Mental health: How Alabama is responding \(/story/news/2017/10/06/alabama-mental-health-protect-our-consumers/727493001/\)](/story/news/2017/10/06/alabama-mental-health-protect-our-consumers/727493001/)

"It is our problem. It is our challenge," Strange said. "We know that every single incident, we are responsible to prevent and solve, but we need your help as well."

More: [Mayor Strange: Fewer crimes, more arrests in Montgomery \(/story/news/crime/2017/08/28/mpd-fewer-crimes-more-arrests/608421001/\)](/story/news/crime/2017/08/28/mpd-fewer-crimes-more-arrests/608421001/)

The city will be offering both recruiting and retaining bonuses to police officers, he said, to keep more police on the streets and deal with understaffing. There will also be a program to recruit certified law enforcement professionals to help police the city, though they won't necessarily be the "front-line" officers. "This is going to be a multiplier for us," Strange said of the initiative.

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More boots on the ground doesn't just apply to the police, Strange said, adding that parents, educators, psychologists and mental health experts will all play a role in driving down crime rates.

Our view: [Hold parents accountable for gun violence, too \(/story/opinion/2017/06/30/our-view-hold-parents-accountable-gun-violence-too/440131001/\)](/story/opinion/2017/06/30/our-view-hold-parents-accountable-gun-violence-too/440131001/)

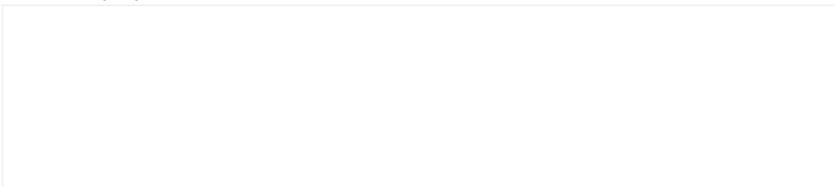
Police Chief Ernest Finley said he appreciated the mayor's frankness while calling on citizens to reach out to police more often. He said people should pick up the phone and call 911 before posting a video to social media.

"You have to believe in us, and we need to believe in you," Finley said. "We need the community to help us out. If you see something, say something. Call. Make us accountable, make us build that trust ... in how we protect and serve the community."

More: [Mayor: Parents can be charged for child gun violence \(/story/news/crime/2017/06/29/mayor-parents-can-charged-child-gun-violence/441177001/\)](/story/news/crime/2017/06/29/mayor-parents-can-charged-child-gun-violence/441177001/)

Police are working with the DEA, FBI, ATF and "all the letter agencies you can think of," said Maj. Scott Tatum, assuring citizens that the police are using every available avenue to solve cases that come to them.

Strange asked that organizations like churches, the YMCA and others continue to provide mentors and role models for Montgomery's youth because many children don't have that type of positive interaction in their lives. He highlighted the Samaritan Center as a group that the city is partnering with to reach out to the city's youth to "find those individuals that need a shoulder to lean on."





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