



# THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL STRATEGY TO REDUCE HOMICIDES

MAY 2023

**GREATER  
ST. LOUIS INC.**

**RB  
C** REGIONAL  
BUSINESS  
COUNCIL

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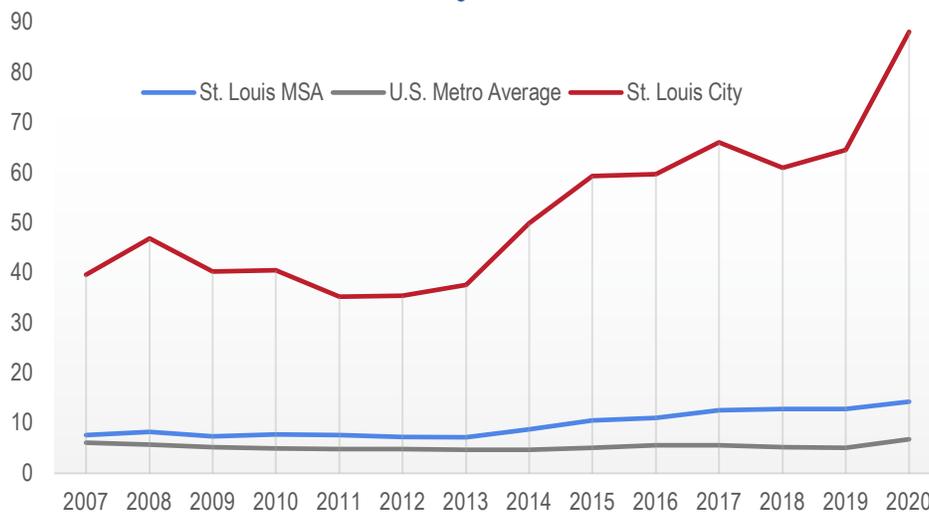
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# 1

## [1.1] Background

St. Louis faces a homicide crisis. The St. Louis, MO-IL Metropolitan Statistical Area’s (MSA)<sup>i</sup> homicide rate is among the highest in the U.S., over double the U.S. metro average in 2020. At least 360 people were killed in 2022 in the St. Louis MSA. The killing is heavily – though far from entirely – concentrated in certain neighborhoods within the City of St. Louis.<sup>ii</sup> The number of killings in the City of St. Louis has dropped during 2021 and 2022 from the 2020 peak. Nonetheless, homicide remains, by far, the number one crime problem our region faces.

Homicides per 100,000 Population<sup>iii</sup>  
Figure 1



A related crisis involves the economic consequences of a perception of significantly more widespread violence and crime throughout the metro area. While rates of total crime and property crime have steadily decreased for years, the St. Louis MSA has a homicide problem that sets it apart from other areas. The City of St. Louis has historically been called a “murder capital.”<sup>iv</sup> In addition to the tragic loss of life due to violence in the metro, **too many people feel unsafe living in, visiting, or working in the St. Louis metro.** Criminology experts concur that perceptions of violence impact decisions about where businesses choose to locate and people choose to live.<sup>v</sup> After careful study and deliberation, members of Greater St. Louis, Inc.’s (GSL) Policy Advisory Board have determined that crime and public safety are a leading barrier to the implementation and success of the *STL 2030 Jobs Plan*.

Reducing violent crime is essential to save lives and advance inclusive economic growth. The Regional Business Council (RBC) agrees with this assessment and has joined GSL in issuing this white paper.

GSL & the RBC seek to elevate the regional conversation around this important work and advance the development of a regional violence reduction strategy.

**[1.2] Approach**

Prominent criminologist Thomas Abt’s 2019 book, *Bleeding Out*, details evidence-based approaches that have proven effective in reducing gun violence and homicide. “Focused deterrence” initiatives identify individuals and groups that are at high risk for violence, as offenders and victims, and brings them into meetings with criminal justice officials, family and community members, and service providers. Participants are offered both a range of social services support and additional law enforcement attention if needed. Focused deterrence has proven effective in reducing violent crime and is the cornerstone of the Abt’s multifaceted Violence Reduction Program at the University of Maryland. The St. Louis MSA urgently needs a *regional* strategy that adopts such evidence-based approaches at scale to reduce homicide.

**[1.3] Next Steps**

Based on recommendations from experts at the Council on Criminal Justice, the St. Louis MSA must make homicide reduction a top priority and commit to a quantitative goal for reducing the region’s homicide rate.<sup>vi</sup>

Experts such as Thomas Abt can provide guidance and best practices regarding implementation strategy. Development and implementation of such a strategy requires buy-in from government and community leaders, continuous monitoring of real time crime data, rigorous policy and program evaluation, and revisions to crime reduction plans based on evaluation results.

**[1.4] Conclusion**

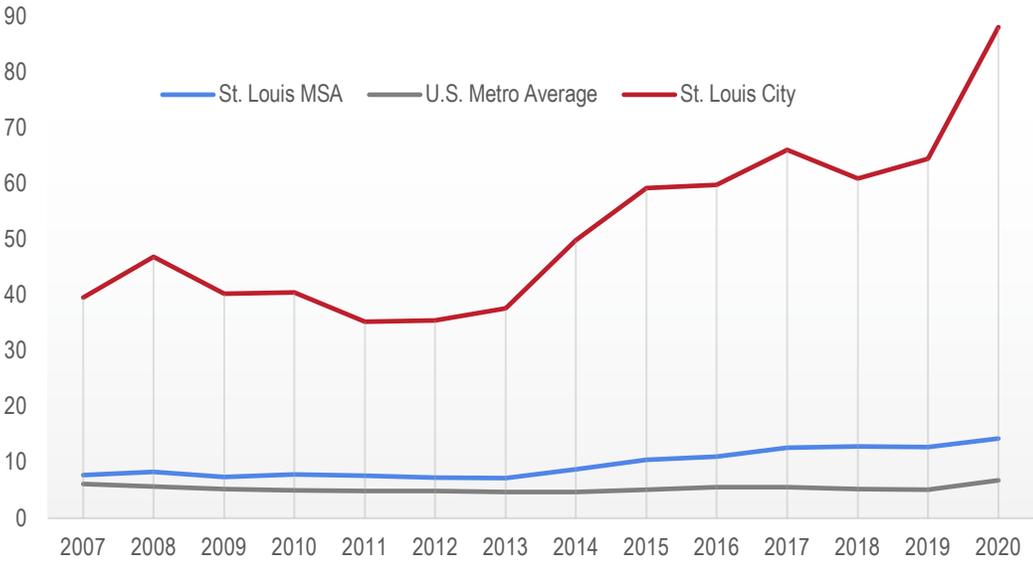
Under the auspices of the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, the St. Louis metro’s chief elected officials intend to convene a Regional Crime Summit in May 2023 to address these issues. Thomas Abt will share more information about his approach at this summit. GSL and the RBC commend the region’s leaders for holding this Summit and hope this white paper is valuable to leaders and stakeholders as background for this critical civic conversation. GSL and the RBC strongly support the adoption of a comprehensive regional strategy to reduce violence with a specific focus and goal on the urgent crisis of homicide.

[2.1] The St. Louis Metro’s Homicide Crisis

St. Louis faces a homicide crisis. These killings result in not just the tragic loss of lives, but traumatic effects on whole families and neighborhoods where people don’t feel safe. The St. Louis, MO-IL Metropolitan Statistical Area’s (MSA) homicide rate is among the highest in the U.S., over double the U.S. metro average in 2020. At least 360 people were killed in 2022 in the St. Louis MSA. The number of killings in the City of St. Louis has dropped during 2021 and 2022 from the 2020 peak. Nonetheless, homicide remains, by far, the number one crime problem our region faces. The killing is heavily – though far from entirely – concentrated in certain neighborhoods within the City of St. Louis.vii

Homicides per 100,000 Populationviii

Figure 1



Homicides are often linked to other types of violent crime, and nationally recognized criminologist Thomas Abt, Associate Research Professor at the University of Maryland’s top rated Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Founding Director of their Violence Reduction Center, writes that homicide is “a useful indicator of trends in violent crime generally, as other offenses tend to rise and fall in unison with homicide over the medium and long term.” ix

While rates of total crime and property crime have steadily decreased for years, the St. Louis MSA has a homicide crisis that sets it apart from other areas. The City of St. Louis has historically been called the “murder capital” and “its crime rate consistently places it within the top-ten most homicidal metropolises in the world”, according to one estimate.<sup>x</sup>

A related crisis involves the material consequences of a perception throughout the metro area of widespread, unchecked violent crime. A recent LexisNexis search found 509 articles referencing murder in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from March 29, 2022, to March 29, 2023 – excluding references to novels, movies, book reviews, or the newspaper’s archives. According to survey research continuously conducted since November 2018 for the STLMade regional narrative effort, crime is the number one reason cited by both City and suburban residents for feelings of disappointment in the metro, and fewer than 20% of residents agree that St. Louis is working to reduce crime and make the metro safer.<sup>xi</sup> These perceptions of widespread, high crime levels have their own separate serious economic consequences for the region.

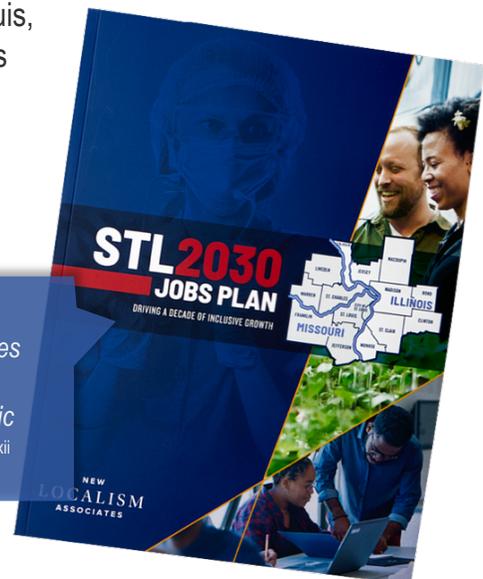
## [2.2] Reducing Violent Crime is Essential to Save Lives and Advance Inclusive Economic Growth

Greater St. Louis, Inc. (GSL) is a network of business and civic leaders committed to driving economic growth in the St. Louis metropolitan area with a unified voice, a bold agenda, and as one metro area anchored by a vibrant urban core. With over 600 civic and business investors of all sizes, GSL is charged with stewarding the implementation of the *STL 2030 Jobs Plan*, a long-term action plan to foster inclusive economic growth in the metro area.

The Regional Business Council (RBC) is composed of over 100 CEOs who put their considerable talent, resources, and determination behind a range of business, civic, and philanthropic priorities including public safety. The RBC agrees that public safety is fundamental to growing the economy and improving quality of life in our region.

The *STL 2030 Jobs Plan* acknowledges that the St. Louis, MO-IL metro area (MSA) has globally significant assets and strengths yet has struggled economically, falling from the 10<sup>th</sup> largest metro in the nation in 1970 to 21<sup>st</sup> today. Among many other issues, crime plays a role as both effect and cause of this struggle.

*“The heart of the metro is trapped in a vicious cycle created by decades of white flight, urban depopulation and ‘benign neglect’ of the communities most in need of investment. Increased crime is part of this cycle as well, offering evidence of some residents’ despair that other routes to economic stability are possible. And the entire metro economy suffers as a result.”<sup>xii</sup>*



The *STL 2030 Jobs Plan – by definition* – is an economic action plan focused on what the private and civic sectors can do to foster inclusive economic growth. As leaders from GSL wrote in the foreword to the plan, “*We recognize that no single plan, organization, or initiative will represent the singular answer as to how St. Louis will realize its potential.*” The plan points out that a number of other critical concerns, including crime and public safety, education, and others, merit their own dedicated regional efforts.

No one organization or effort is sufficient to address a problem as broad as reducing violent crime across the region. We acknowledge and are grateful to all the agencies and organizations working on elements of this issue including in the areas of violence prevention, community development, law enforcement, mental health, workforce, and others. Among the many organizations working in this space, the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission is notable as a major regional collaboration of groups working on gun violence prevention and reduction. The Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis is an example of region-wide collaboration involving 120 participating agencies that is recognized as a national leader with a clearance rate of over 80% on investigations with which it is called to assist. The City of St. Louis’ Office of Violence Prevention and numerous community violence initiatives, including Cure Violence, are other examples of public, private, and civic efforts to reduce violence. As one concerned stakeholder among many, the business community seeks to elevate the regional conversation around the criticality of reducing homicide and violent crime and advancing the development of a regional strategy that includes a focus on both prevention and deterrence.



After careful study and deliberation, members of GSL’s Policy Advisory Board have determined that crime and public safety are a leading barrier to the implementation and success of the *STL 2030 Jobs Plan*. The RBC agrees with this assessment and has joined GSL in issuing this white paper. To better understand the issue, GSL has retained **Dr. Richard Rosenfeld**, Curators’ Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, to help us analyze recent regional crime

trends and offer recommendations on a regional strategy. Dr. Rosenfeld and other nationally recognized criminology experts believe such a strategy must start with addressing homicide and violent crime.

This white paper offers a timely update on the state of homicide and violent crime in the 15-county, bi-state St. Louis MSA. The purpose of the paper is to provide clarity on recent trends in homicide and violent crime. We urgently believe a regional strategy to reduce homicides and violent crime is essential to save lives and foster inclusive economic growth throughout the St. Louis MSA.

Without a balanced and resourced regional strategy to reduce homicides and violent crime, too many lives will be cut short. Too many families will grieve. And the *STL 2030 Jobs Plan* will not deliver its full potential to create inclusive growth and broader prosperity for all St. Louisans. We respectfully urge the St. Louis MSA's elected leaders to adopt a coordinated strategy to reduce violent crime, starting with a specific goal for homicide reduction.

### [2.3] Impact of Perception on Our Region's Economy

In addition to the tragic loss of life to violence in the metro, criminology experts concur that perceptions of violence impact decisions about where businesses choose to locate, and people choose to live.<sup>xiii</sup> These decisions shape the economic future of the region. **Today, too many people feel unsafe living in, visiting, or working in the St. Louis metro.** Both the reality and perception of widespread violence negatively impact the ability of the metro area to attract new residents, businesses and visitors and to foster economic growth.

Businesses' location decisions are based heavily on perceptions of crime and public safety.



*“Experts say media coverage of crime can play a significant role in how safety in a city is perceived, regardless of whether statistics back it up. Even the statistics themselves can be misleading.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

Business executives are more influenced by headlines about crime than actual evidence of how much crime is taking place. The same conditions that prompt people to relocate may also prompt business relocations and impact the ability of a city to attract new business.

## [2.4] Recent Events & the Regional Crime Summit

Total crime rates in the St. Louis MSA and City of St. Louis have been falling for over a decade (see figure 7 below). However, the rate of homicide in the St. Louis MSA is more than double the national average for metro areas. These homicides dominate the public discussion and perceptions about crime.

An October 2021 report by the Council on Criminal Justice, co-authored by Richard Rosenfeld, PhD, reviewed trends in crime related to the pandemic and social unrest. The report studied a sample of large U.S. cities, not including St. Louis. It found that these factors coincided with elevated rates of homicides and serious assaults and stated that **urgent action is required** to address the plague of violence. *“As the pandemic subsides, pursuing crime-control strategies of proven effectiveness and enacting needed policing reforms will be essential to achieving durable reductions in violent crime in our cities.”*<sup>xv</sup> The St. Louis MSA must urgently address this crisis and stop the killing and violence.

The regions’ chief elected officials have asked the East-West Gateway Council of Governments to convene a Regional Crime Summit. GSL and the RBC welcome this call, and representatives of the civic and business community look forward to participating in the summit alongside other stakeholders in May 2023.

GSL, the RBC, and Dr. Richard Rosenfeld are pleased to release this white paper in advance of the summit to help inform the dialogue around a regional strategy to address violent crime, beginning with homicide.

# THE ST. LOUIS HOMICIDE CRISIS

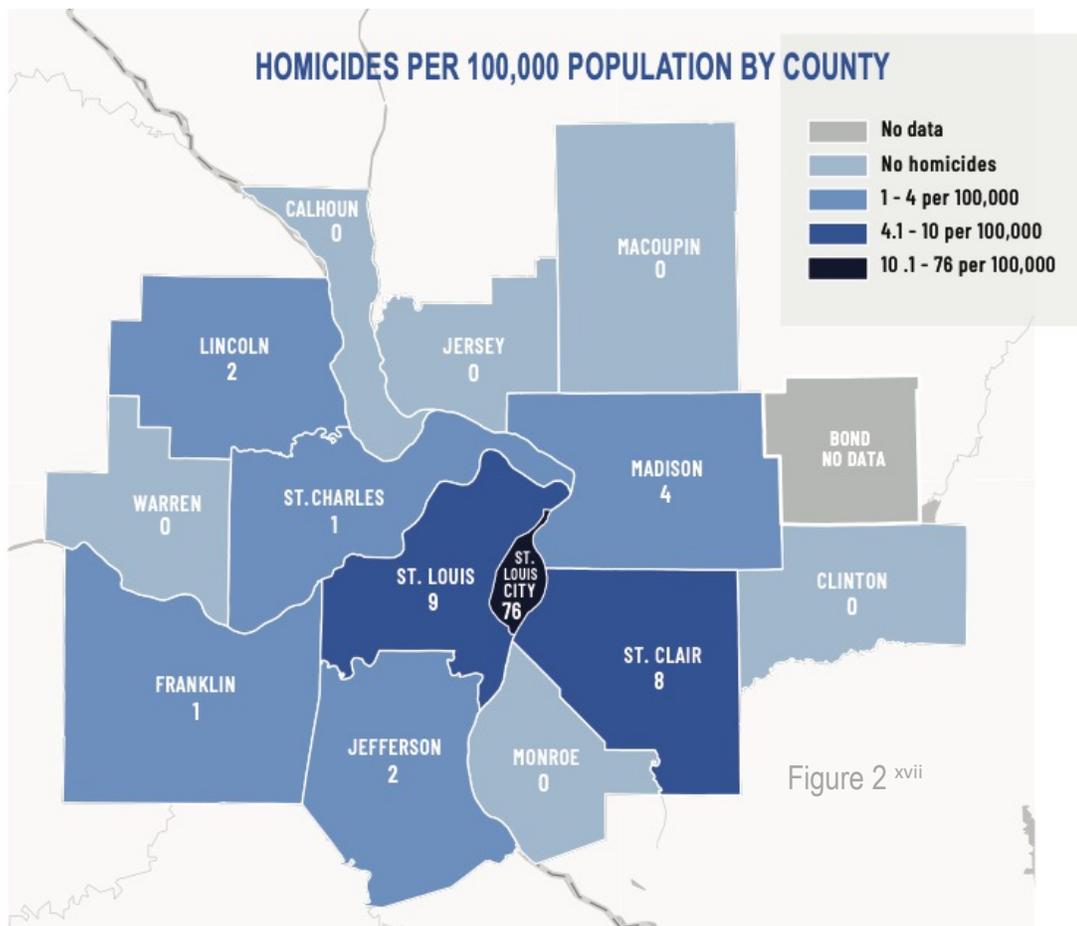
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## [3.1] Quantifying the St. Louis Homicide Crisis

The following three sections will walk through the crime data for the St. Louis MSA as compared with the U.S. metro area average and the City of St. Louis. We will begin our analysis by discussing trends in the St. Louis homicide rate in recent years and then turn to aggravated assaults. All serious violence has the potential to result in death; the difference between a nonfatal and fatal assault often depends on whether a bullet or blow hits a vital organ. Note that homicides include murder and nonnegligent manslaughter in the statistics included in this paper.

## [3.2] Geography of Homicide Throughout the Metro Area

While homicide and violent crime may be concentrated primarily in the City of St. Louis, a significant number of homicides take place each year in other jurisdictions. In 2022, the City of St. Louis reported at least 221 killings, or 62.1% of the homicides in the MSA.<sup>xvi</sup> Although there are homicides reported in most of the counties within the St. Louis MSA, they are more highly concentrated within a few counties as shown in the map below.



### 3.2.1 Homicides are Concentrated in a Few Areas

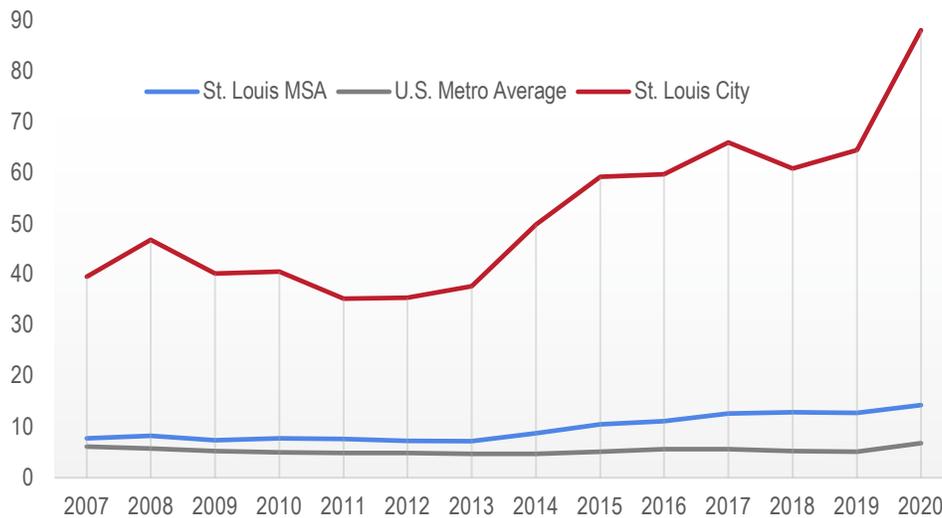
This is indeed a regional crisis. At the same time, homicides are concentrated in a few areas. This concentration makes applying anti-violence programs to these areas practicable.

Within the St. Louis MSA, homicides are heavily – though certainly not entirely – concentrated in the City of St. Louis. The chart below shows that although the homicide rate in the St. Louis MSA was above the U.S. metro average in 2007, it has since then risen to over double the U.S. metro average in 2020 with 404 homicides.<sup>xviii</sup> Although official FBI data has not been released for 2021 or 2022, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch tracked 360 people who were killed in 2022 in the St. Louis MSA.<sup>xix</sup>

In 2020, the total homicide rate per 100,000 population in the City of St. Louis is over six times as high (616%) as in the St. Louis MSA. The City of St. Louis' total homicides were 65% of the St. Louis MSA total in 2020.

Homicides in the City of St. Louis are overwhelmingly committed with firearms. In 2021, 92% of homicides in the City were committed with a firearm compared to 88% in the St. Louis MSA. These rates are significantly higher than the U.S. rate of 81% of homicides committed with firearms.<sup>xx</sup>

**Homicides per 100,000 Population<sup>xxi</sup>**  
[ Figure 1 ]



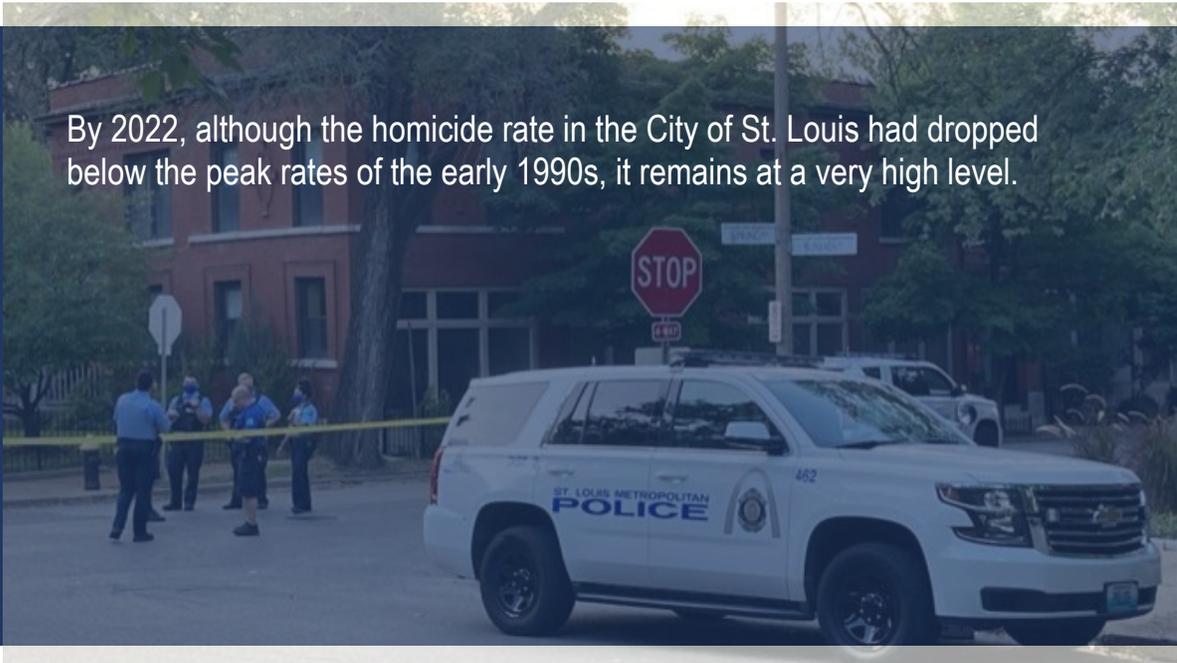
The following chart shows the City of St. Louis homicide rate from 1985 through 2022. Recent rates are similar to the previous highs set in the early 1990's. The rate in 2020 was the highest, by far, during this entire 38 year period.

**Homicides per 100,000 Population – City of St. Louis<sup>xxii</sup>**  
[ Figure 3 ]



**In 2020, the City of St. Louis accounted for over 1/3 of the total homicides committed in the State of Missouri.<sup>xxiii</sup>**

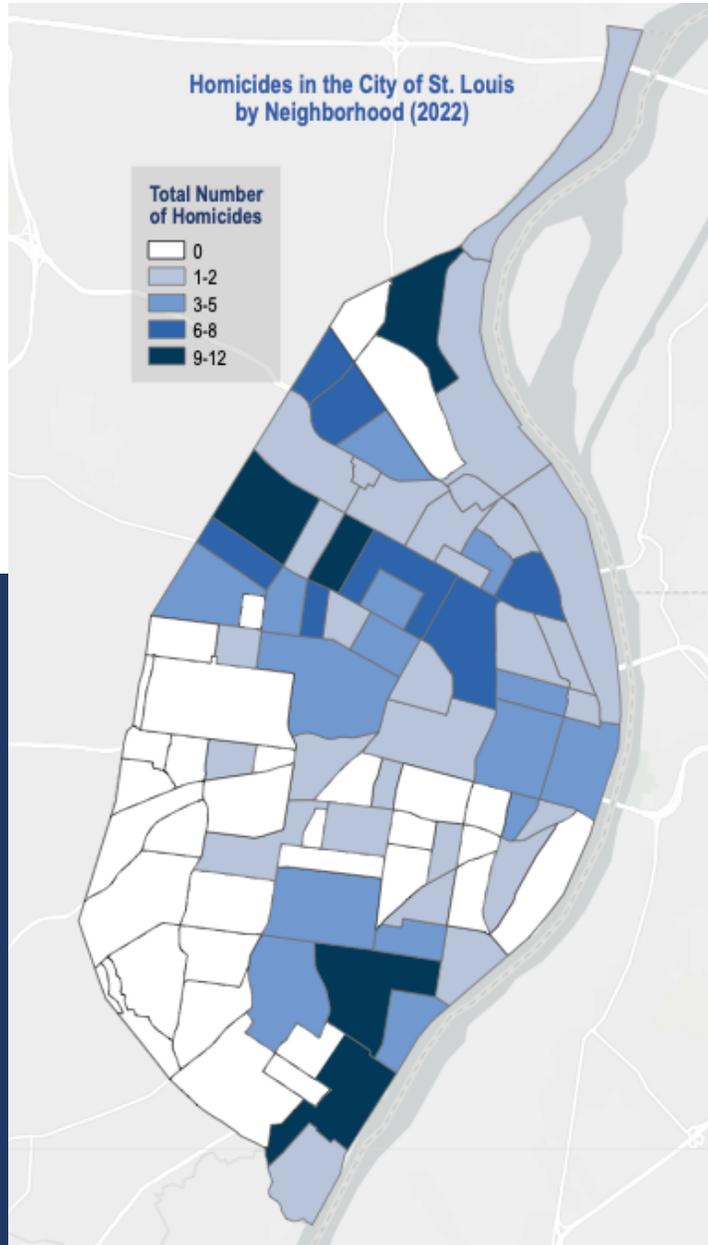
By 2022, although the homicide rate in the City of St. Louis had dropped below the peak rates of the early 1990s, it remains at a very high level.



### 3.2.2 Homicides are Concentrated in a Few Areas

Within the MSA, homicides are concentrated in the City of St. Louis, specifically in parts of north City. When homicides surged in 2020 by 36% (from 194 to 264), half of the increase took place in just six of the City's 79 neighborhoods.<sup>xxiv</sup> This map of 2022 homicide locations by neighborhood illustrates this concentration.

10 of the 12 neighborhoods with 6+ homicides were north of Delmar Boulevard. (2022)



[ Figure 4 ]<sup>xxv</sup>

### [3.3] Comparing the St. Louis Homicide Rate to Other Metros

Table 1 compares the St. Louis MSA homicide rate to 22 other metros. These areas were selected because recent crime data were available for them and to cover all regions of the country. Note that this sample is not necessarily representative of all metro areas in the nation. The rates shown in the table are homicides per 100,000 metro area population.

#### Homicide Rate Per 100,000 in 22 Metro Statistical Areas [ Table 1 ]

The St. Louis homicide rate ranks fourth from the top, behind only Memphis, New Orleans, and Baltimore. The St. Louis homicide rate is more than twice that in Phoenix, Cincinnati, Springfield, and several other metro areas. Although nonfatal violent crimes are far more numerous than homicide, greater attention is naturally devoted to homicide when considering the crime problem in the region. Crimes that end in the victim's death warrant heightened attention.



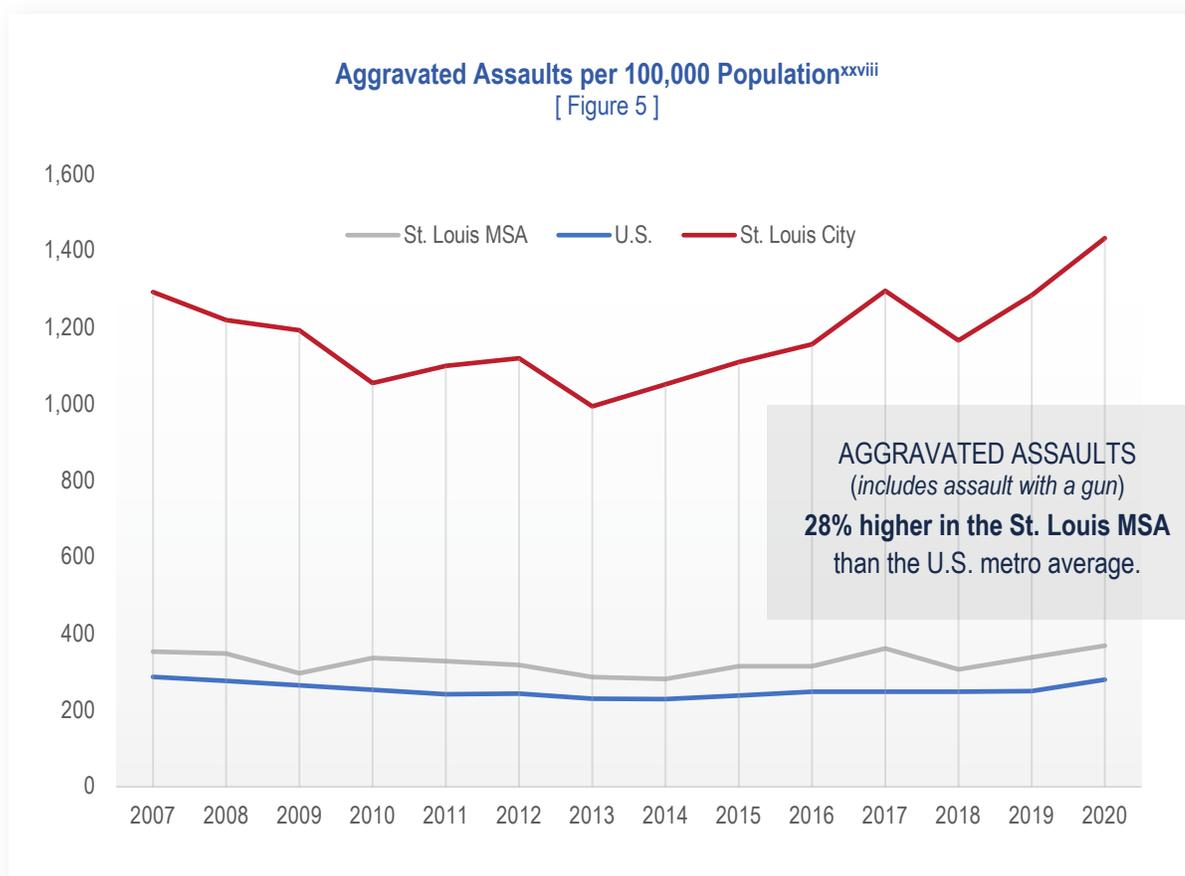
Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)	Rate	Most Recent Year Reported <sup>xxvi</sup>
Memphis	24.2	2020
New Orleans	21.7	2020
Baltimore	15.5	2019
<b>St. Louis (#4)</b>	14.3	<b>2020</b>
Milwaukee	13.1	2020
Detroit	10.5	2019
Jacksonville	9.9	2020
Indianapolis	9.3	2018
Houston	9.2	2020
Philadelphia	8.9	2020
Oklahoma City	7.8	2020
Nashville	7.7	2020
Miami	7.5	2020
Phoenix	6.2	2020
Cincinnati	5.7	2020
Los Angeles	5.6	2020
Springfield, MO	5.5	2020
San Francisco	5.3	2020
Charlotte	5.2	2018
Washington	5.0	2020
Seattle	4.5	2018
Dallas	4.4	2018

### [3.4] Aggravated Assaults

Aggravated assaults are defined by the FBI as:

*“An unlawful attack by one person upon another wherein the offender uses a weapon or displays it in a threatening manner, or the victim suffers obvious severe or aggravated bodily injury involving apparent broken bones, loss of teeth, possible internal injury, severe laceration, or loss of consciousness. ...”<sup>xxvii</sup>*

Aggravated assaults include assault with a gun and are closely related to the homicide rate. Rates of aggravated assaults are 28% higher in the St. Louis MSA than the U.S. metro average and are very high in the City of St. Louis.



# VIOLENT CRIME IN ST. LOUIS

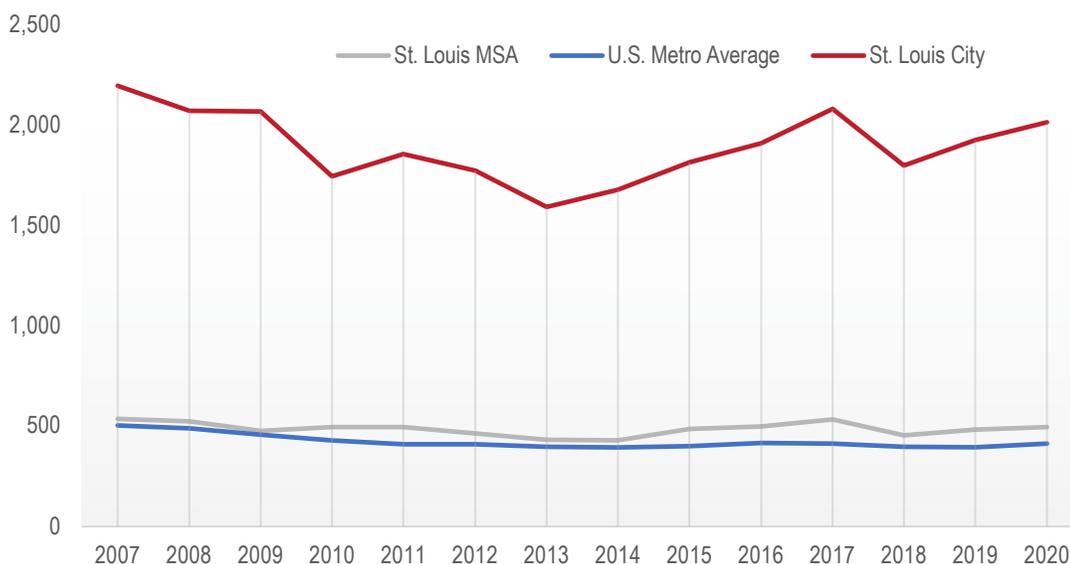
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## [4.1] Violent Crime in St. Louis

We next focus on violent crime overall. The St. Louis MSA violent crime rate is almost 20% higher than the U.S. metro average. Between 2007 and 2020 the rate has fallen slightly in the St. Louis MSA, but less than the decline in the U.S. metro average rate in that same period. Violent crimes include homicides, aggravated assaults (assaults committed with a weapon or that threaten or produce serious bodily injury), robberies (thefts accompanied by force or threat of force), and rapes.

The total violent crime rate per 100,000 in the City of St. Louis is more than quadruple (406%) that for the St. Louis MSA in 2020. 43% of the violent crimes committed in the St. Louis MSA take place in the City of St. Louis.

**Violent Crime per 100,000 Population<sup>xxix</sup>**  
[ Figure 6 ]



A comparison of violent crime rates in 22 metropolitan areas across the country is shown in Table 2. These are the same 22 metro areas shown in Table 1. The rates shown in the table are violent crimes per 100,000 metro area population.

**Violent Crime Rate Per 100,000  
in 22 Metro Statistical Areas (MSAs)**  
[ Table 2 ]

Unlike homicide, St. Louis ranks in the middle of the distribution with a violent crime rate of 497 per 100,000. The St. Louis violent crime rate is less than half of the rate in Memphis (1,359) and substantially below the rates in Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Indianapolis. At 622 per 100,000, the violent crime rate in Springfield, MO, is higher than the St. Louis rate. While reducing violent crimes of all types is a high priority for our region, St. Louis does not stand out among U.S. metropolitan areas in its rate of violent crime.

Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)	Rate	Most Recent Year Reported <sup>xxx</sup>
Memphis	1,359	2020
Baltimore	699	2019
Milwaukee	678	2020
Indianapolis	642	2018
Houston	632	2020
Springfield, MO	632	2020
New Orleans	624	2020
Nashville	616	2020
Detroit	570	2020
Jacksonville	500	2020
<b>St. Louis (#11)</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>2020</b>
Los Angeles	473	2020
Oklahoma City	471	2020
Phoenix	464	2020
San Francisco	440	2020
Charlotte	427	2018
Miami	417	2020
Philadelphia	409	2018
Dallas	351	2018
Seattle	340	2020
Washington	245	2020
Cincinnati	236	2020

However, assaults and robberies in St. Louis are much more likely to prove fatal than in most other metropolitan areas. The fatality rate of violent crime can be expressed as the ratio of the violent crime rate (minus homicide) to the homicide rate.

In St. Louis this ratio is 35-to-1 (497/14.3). In other words, there is one homicide for every 35 nonfatal violent crimes. The comparable ratios in Nashville and Springfield, both of which have higher violent crime rates than St. Louis, are 79-to-1 and 114-to-1. The likelihood that a violent crime will be fatal is two to three times lower in Nashville and Springfield than in St. Louis. Even in Memphis, which ranks at the top of both the violent crime and homicide distributions, violent crimes are less likely to produce death than they are in St. Louis (55-to-1 versus 35-to-1).

The St. Louis MSA has a violent crime problem that needs to be addressed but is not notably greater than in other metropolitan areas. St. Louis has a homicide problem that sets it apart from other areas and requires an immediate, coordinated, and urgent response. Fortunately, the same approaches that have proven effective in reducing violence generally are also effective in reducing homicide (see section 6.1).

## TOTAL CRIME IN ST. LOUIS

# 5

Lastly, we look at the statistics around total crime rates in the St. Louis MSA, U.S. metros, and the City of St. Louis. Total crime is the sum of violent and property crime.

### St. Louis, MO-IL MSA Crime Statistics and Rank, 2020 <sup>xxxii\*\*</sup> [ Table 3 ]

A comparison of 2020 FBI data on metropolitan areas ranks the St. Louis MSA 83<sup>rd</sup> in its per capita crime rate among 276 reporting U.S. metropolitan areas.<sup>xxxii</sup> This is relatively low for a large metro area. Out of the 50 largest U.S. metro areas, the St. Louis MSA ranked as the 18<sup>th</sup>-highest total crime rate.

Total Crime / per 100,000	2,750
MSA Total Crime Rank	83 <sup>rd</sup>
Violent Crime / per 100,000	497
MSA Violent Crime Rank	72 <sup>nd</sup>
Property Crime / per 100,000	2,253
MSA Property Crime Rank	94 <sup>th</sup>



### TOTAL STL CRIME RATES PER CAPITA ARE DOWN (2007-2020) <sup>xxxiii</sup>

34% in the City of St. Louis | 32% in the St. Louis MSA

Total crime rates per capita in the St. Louis MSA are very similar to U.S. metro averages and continue to improve.

## [5.1] The St. Louis Geography of Total Crime

As with any region, crime is not evenly dispersed but is concentrated in particular areas. Many of these areas fall within the City of St. Louis which has a relatively small population, making the calculated crime rates per capita relatively large.

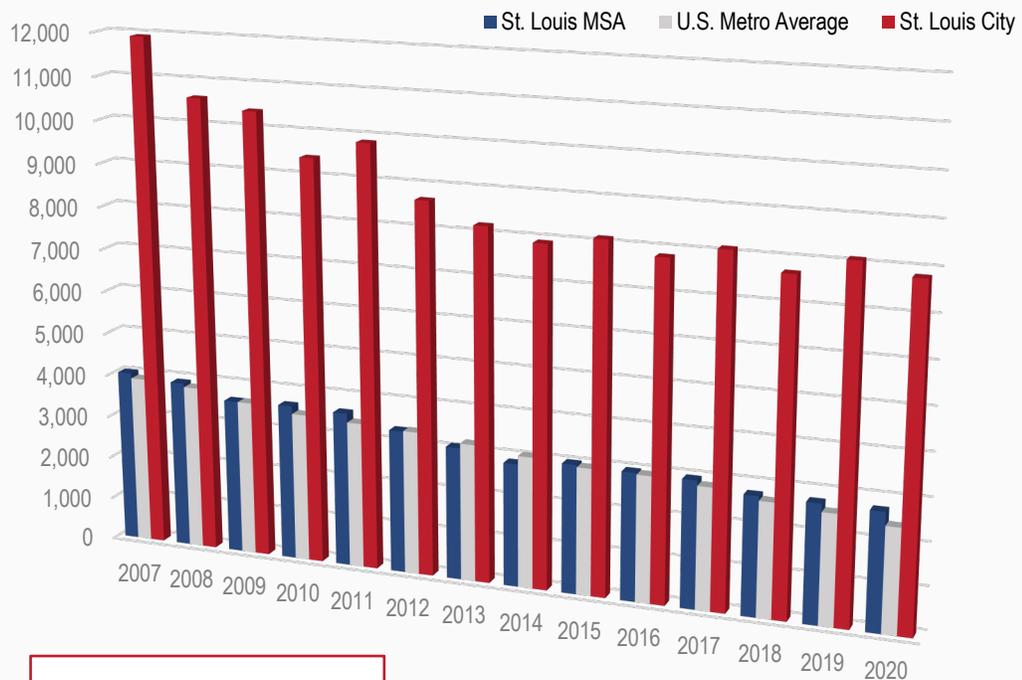


**“Geographic location (where the boundary is drawn between city and suburb) is critical to the crime ranking score in St. Louis. The city’s tight boundaries restrict the most populated part of the area from being factored into the equation.”**

*St. Louis city is a mere 62 sq. miles compared to the entire metropolitan area, which measures a total of 3,322 sq. miles.* <sup>xxxiv</sup>

**Total Crime per 100,000 Population<sup>xxxv</sup>**

[ Figure 7 ]

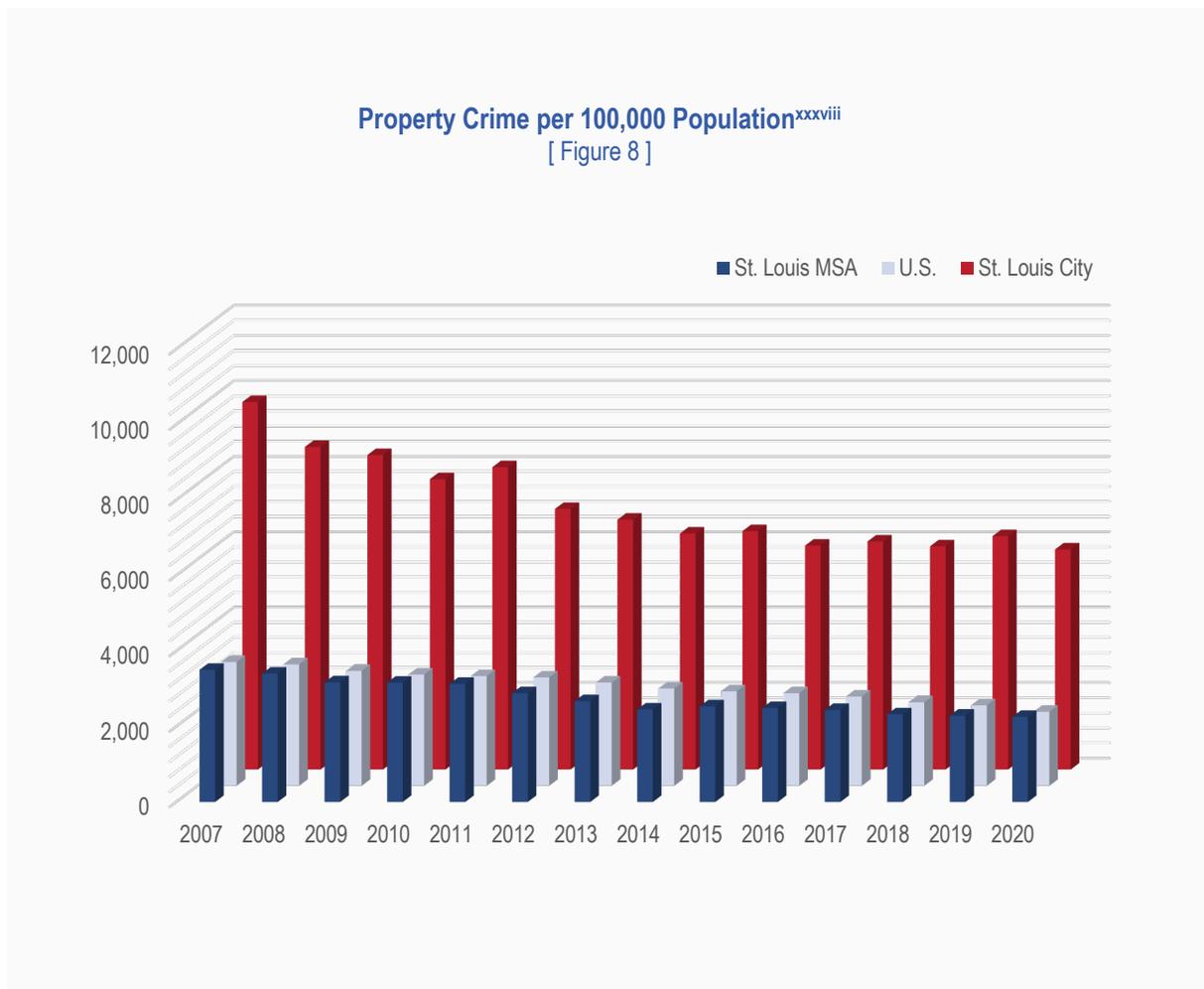


**The City of St. Louis crime rate is almost 3X's (285%) that for the St. Louis MSA in 2020.**

*St. Louis City represents almost 30% of the total crime in the St. Louis MSA in 2020*

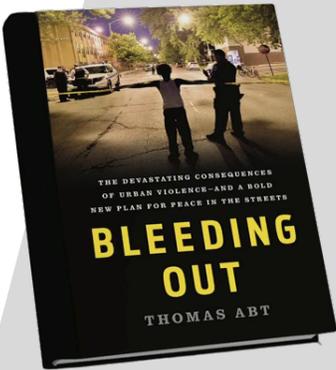
## [5.2] Property Crime

Property crime is the most common type of crime and is defined by the FBI to include burglary, larceny – theft (stealing of property), and motor vehicle theft.<sup>xxxvi</sup> People are more likely to be the victim of property crime than violent crime. Property crime can undermine a sense of security and increase people’s fears of being victimized by violent crime. Property crime rates have been falling in the U.S. and the St. Louis MSA for over twenty years. Property crime per capita is down 40% in the City of St. Louis and 36% in the St. Louis MSA between 2007 and 2020 as compared with a 41% decline in U.S. metro areas.<sup>xxxvii</sup>



[6.1] The St. Louis Geography of Total Crime

Abt’s book *Bleeding Out* makes a clear case for why anti-crime efforts should focus on violent crime. “Why should we as a society prioritize reducing violence? And why should we focus on urban violence in particular? The reasoning is simple but powerful: **the most urgent and fundamental human need is to be secure, free from the dangers that might suddenly end our lives.**”<sup>xxxix</sup>



Homicide also has the highest cost to society. One study found the cost of a single homicide to be 119 times more than an aggravated assault. Protecting the poor from violence is also one of the most effective anti-poverty measures.<sup>xl</sup>

There are also practical reasons to focus limited resources on homicide reduction. “Homicide is the only category of offense where we know the numbers with absolute confidence. Homicide is also a useful indicator of trends in violent crime generally, as other offenses tend to rise and fall in unison with homicide over the medium and long terms.”<sup>xli</sup>

6.1.1 Homicide Rates Remain High

Despite progress on reducing overall crime rates, and recent decreases in homicides in the City of St. Louis, homicide rates in the St. Louis MSA remain unacceptably high. The homicide rate in the City of St. Louis and parts of adjacent areas cause extreme personal and economic damage.

6.1.2 The High Cost of Homicides

Crime is not just a public safety issue. More crime incurs additional costs for governments and taxpayers.

In Abt’s book *Bleeding Out*, he cites three peer-reviewed studies looking at the societal costs of murder. These studies found the cost to be between \$10 and \$19.2 million per murder (in 2017 dollars). These costs include direct costs like medical, property, lost labor, and judicial costs as well as indirect costs such as diminished property values and quality of life.<sup>xlii</sup>

These are staggering numbers. Adjusting these costs for inflation provides a range of between \$12 and \$23 million per murder in 2022.<sup>xliii</sup> By this measure the 360 homicides in the St. Louis MSA cost the region between \$3.6 and \$6.9 billion in 2022.<sup>xliv</sup> A 10% reduction in homicides in the St. Louis MSA would then save an estimated \$360 to \$690 million per year. Most importantly, driving down the crime rate saves lives. But it also saves very real costs to society at large.

### 6.1.3 **Homicides and Violent Crime Perpetuate Chronic Poverty**

According to the FBI, among the factors known to affect the volume and type of crime in an area are, *“Economic conditions, including median income, poverty level, and job availability.”*<sup>xlv</sup>

Homicides disproportionately affect African Americans who represent 58% of the victims in the St. Louis MSA in 2022.<sup>xlvi</sup> *“For most of the last century, African Americans were deliberately excluded from desirable neighborhoods via redlining, blockbusting, restrictive covenants, and other forms of public and private discrimination. This persecution left black people with nowhere to go but areas with inferior public transportation, and insufficient access to capital.”*<sup>xlvii</sup> The effects of these exclusionary practices are still evident in St. Louis today.

Thomas Abt’s book *Bleeding Out* discusses these connections in depth. He writes, *“Urban violence acts as a linchpin for urban poverty, locking the conditions of concentrated poverty into place and undermining efforts to achieve broader social and economic progress. ... Communities confronting high rates of violence must start where they are, with the violence that is right in front of them. The surest path to prosperity begins with peace.”*<sup>xlviii</sup>

Abt, however, stresses that violent crime cannot be reduced through poverty reduction efforts alone. The violence must be addressed first in order to provide a necessary precondition for poverty reduction. *“Violence is not simply a manifestation of poverty; it is a force that perpetuates poverty as well. Poverty might precede violence, but reducing poverty requires working backward, beginning with the violence that we experience today.”*<sup>xlix</sup>



## [6.2] Past Research and Reports

In recent years, experts have published several prominent, thorough, and credible reports on crime and policing in Greater St. Louis. The following are brief summaries of key reports.

### 6.2.1 *Police Executive Research Forum Report*

In 2014, Better Together commissioned the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to produce a report on St. Louis City and County policing.

In 2015, PERF released a study focusing on the state of policing in St. Louis City and County with a series of policy recommendations. PERF conducted meetings with local residents, interviews with community leaders, and in-depth research to ascertain existing issues with local police departments and possible avenues for addressing these issues in the blue box.

The PERF report found, *“All of these issues together are undermining the quality of policing services and harming the reputation of St. Louis City and County. The future safety, economic health, and vitality of the region will require not only addressing the immediate problems today, but also creating new approaches and better systems that are recognized as national ‘best practices.’”*<sup>1</sup>

PERF provided recommendations in response to their findings, which primarily focus on standardizing police training and improving standards, improving cross-regional data collection and sharing, improving enforcement of the limits on municipal revenues from traffic violations, implementing strategic consolidations of certain municipalities and agencies, and improving police–community relations.

**This detailed review and report identified several major issues:**

Highly fragmented nature of policing in St. Louis County, which includes multiple municipal departments

Inappropriate objectives in many police departments (such as revenue generation)

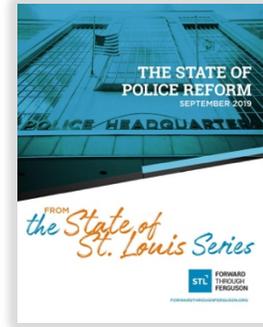
Lack of community policing

Inconsistent standards and training amongst municipal police agencies

Concerns about racial bias in policing

### 6.2.2 *Forward Through Ferguson Report on Police Reform*

In 2019, Forward Through Ferguson issued a report on The State of Police Reform which summarized changes in the Ferguson Police Department, North County Police Cooperative, and City of St. Louis Police Department since the killing of Michael Brown in 2014 and the release of the Ferguson Commission Report. The report examines changes in programs, practices, and policies in these departments.



The report found that, of the 16 Calls to Action from the Ferguson Commission Report related to policing, none were complete or nearly so in any of these police departments. However, each of these departments had made some combination of programmatic or policy-focused progress on most of the calls to action. The report then described the factors that have both facilitated and held back change.

This progress is uneven, incomplete, and differs between departments. The report stressed that these changes are a long term regional commitment that will require both sustained pressure to achieve and ongoing support to sustain.<sup>li</sup>

### 6.2.3 *Teneo Strategy Administrative Reviews*



In 2020, the RBC and member companies of Civic Progress commissioned Teneo to perform administrative reviews of the police departments in St. Louis City and County. Among the findings of these reports were a lack of coordination between St. Louis City and County police departments.



*“[The City of St. Louis and St. Louis County] do not analyze and share criminal intelligence in any regular or strategic manner tied to specific crime-reduction efforts.”<sup>lii</sup>*

*“The [St. Louis County Police Department] does not have a coordinated agency-wide methodology to reduce crime.”*

*“There is no existing structure for the SLCPD and the SLMPD to formally and regularly collaborate in reducing crime. While individual relationships between command and rank-and-file members in the County and City are positive, there is no concerted formal effort to strategically combat spill-over crime.”<sup>liii</sup>*

#### 6.2.4 **Giffords Law Center to Reduce Gun Violence Reports**

The Missouri Foundation for Health contracted with the Giffords Law Center to Reduce Gun Violence to study community violence in St. Louis City and County. In 2022 the Giffords Law Center released reports on addressing violence in St. Louis City and County.

*“Multiple stakeholders [in St. Louis] pointed to both the deep silos in which many organizations and agencies are carrying out their work and the lack of government resources dedicated to improving the coordination of violence reduction efforts. Moreover, multiple stakeholders reported a lack of coordination between the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. ...”<sup>liv</sup>*

*“At most fundamental level, [St. Louis County] lacks a strategic plan to guide its violence reduction work, nor does it have a countywide Office of Violence Prevention to gather and analyze data, coordinate strategies, and provide direct support to organizations engaged in reducing violence by addressing root causes.”<sup>lv</sup>*

*“Equally critical is the lack of a county-backed effort to proactively identify and intervene with individuals who are at the highest risk of engaging in violent behavior, which has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for reducing homicides and shootings in the short-term.”<sup>lvi</sup>*

**GIFFORDS  
LAW CENTER**  
  
**TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE**

#### 6.2.5 **Past Report Recommendations**

The PERF, Teneo Strategy, Forward Through Ferguson, and Giffords Law Center reports all included a range of customized recommendations for the region. An overarching theme of these reports was the need to further cooperate and share resources between police departments in St. Louis City and County. Improving the ability to use and share data and intelligence to apply resources to specific areas of focus is also noted. Continued work also is needed on community policing, use of social workers, and diversity and inclusion.

Some of these recommendations have been addressed including the requirements for police department certification in St. Louis County. Some of the consolidation of small municipal departments has occurred with the formation of the North County Police Cooperative.

Other progress on these recommendations is happening. However, a formal, regional update on progress related to these reports would be helpful in assessing the state of regional policing.

### 6.2.6 **Recent Research on Approaches to Violent Crime**

Thomas Abt's *Bleeding Out* is required reading for anyone committed to reducing violent crime, and gun violence in particular, in our region. As discussed previously, St. Louis has a serious homicide problem. The great majority of homicides are committed with a gun. Thomas Abt's book details evidence-based approaches that have proven effective in reducing gun violence.

Some approaches are community-based, such as training street outreach workers to identify conflict situations that could turn violent and intervene to resolve disputes and offer services and support where needed. Others are law-enforcement centered, such as "hot spot" crime-reduction strategies that elevate police patrols in areas, often quite small, where crime is heavily concentrated or has recently increased. Hot spot policing is the single most well-researched police strategy to reduce crime and the evidence shows overwhelming support for its effectiveness. And some combine elements of both approaches. "Focused deterrence" initiatives identify individuals who are at high risk for violence, as offenders and victims, and bring them into meetings with criminal justice officials, family and community members, and service providers. A two-pronged message is delivered: *"We know who you are and will pull all available levers to stop the violence. Here are services and supports that can put you on a different path."* Focused deterrence has proven effective in reducing criminal involvement in St. Louis<sup>vii</sup> and is the cornerstone of the University of Maryland's multifaceted Violence Reduction Program.

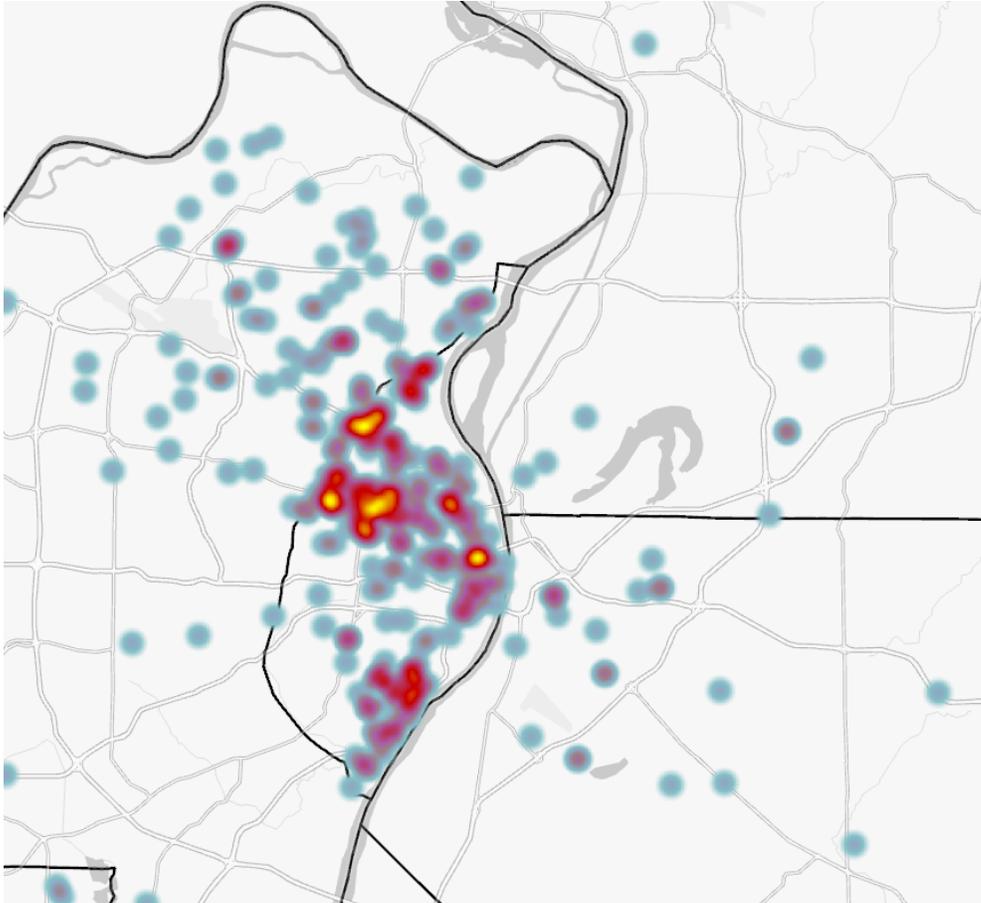
## [6.3] **Necessity of a Regional Strategy**

**Regional problems require regional solutions.** Homicides are a regional problem. *"This isn't just a St. Louis City issue; it's an issue that faces the entire region, because it affects the entire region,"* said Pat Kelly, executive director of the Municipal League of Metro St. Louis.<sup>lviii</sup> Likewise, **"Crime is a regional issue and must be tackled as such,"** said Doug Moore, spokesman for St. Louis County Executive Sam Page.<sup>lix</sup> High levels of homicides and violent crime place a terrible human and economic cost on the entire St. Louis MSA. Widespread negative perceptions of public safety hold back regional growth and prosperity.

St. Louis urgently needs a *regional* strategy to reduce homicide. As noted by the Giffords Law Center to Reduce Gun Violence in a 2022 assessment of efforts in the City of St. Louis, “[A] fight that takes place in the city one day can easily lead to a shooting in the county the following week, and vice versa.”<sup>lx</sup> As the following map clearly illustrates, homicides are not limited by city or county boundaries.

### Homicide Locations Throughout the Region in 2022<sup>lxi</sup>

[ Figure 9 ]



Multiple reports have cited serious communication and coordination challenges between the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (City of St. Louis), the St. Louis County Police Department, and various agencies and organizations managing programs relating to violent crime.

The St. Louis County Police Department maintains jurisdiction over all unincorporated areas of St. Louis County and patrols incorporated municipalities in which it has been contracted to do so. Many municipalities in St. Louis County have their own police departments, and about one-third of municipalities with a police department have jurisdiction over areas that cover less than one square mile. There are over 60 separate police agencies between St. Louis City and County alone, not accounting for police agencies in other counties in the St. Louis MSA.<sup>lxii</sup>

This high degree of fragmentation is compounded by the differences in policing objectives, pay, training, professionalism, and standards in police departments across the region. In addition, the PERF report on addressing regional policing issues in St. Louis highlighted revenue generation objectives and issues with racial bias as additional problems facing regional police departments.



In addition to local governments and police departments, there are a wide array of non-profit and non-governmental organizations in the region that are involved in crime reduction and prevention efforts. Many of these organizations operate in conjunction with the City of St. Louis government, such as the St. Louis Regional Crimestoppers who coordinate with the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. Other non-profits and non-governmental organizations focus on primary crime prevention and many of the organizations have missions associated with violent crime prevention and reducing violent behavior. In addition, many of the academic institutions in St. Louis are involved in crime prevention partnerships, such as the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, that involve research, advocacy, and community-based approaches to tackling crime. While there are many organizations and agencies that appear to fill similar roles and functions, there are also many overlapping partnerships and coalitions that attempt to bring together key players in the region's crime fighting efforts.

## [6.4] An Evidence-Based & Balanced Approach to Reducing Homicides

An evidence-based national best practice, described below, indicates the region's chief elected officials must make homicide-reduction a top priority and commit to a quantitative goal for reducing the region's homicide rate. An expert panel from the Council on Criminal Justice suggests that 10% a year is both reasonable and attainable.<sup>lxiii</sup> These efforts must employ rigorous, evidence-based strategies that balance enforcement with prevention (e.g., a specific strategy of focused deterrence).<sup>lxiv</sup>

As Thomas Abt writes in *Bleeding Out*, “[No] city that has been successful in reducing urban violence can credibly attribute all of its success to a single tough or soft approach – it is always some combination of both. Punishment by itself has not worked. Neither has prevention.”<sup>lxv</sup>

Further, as the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence concludes, “It is now widely recognized that because community violence is a multi-dimensional issue with a number of root causes from poverty to trauma, it can only be effectively addressed with a coordinated response from a range of public and private stakeholders.”<sup>lxvi</sup>

The crisis of lethal violence in St. Louis requires “an all-hands-on-deck response ... based on strategies that have proven effective. [St. Louis] must avoid [strategies] for which evidence is lacking, and require that all violence-reduction strategies are rigorously evaluated.”<sup>xvii</sup>

#### 6.4.1 **Options for a Regional Homicide Reduction Goal**

Setting a realistic and achievable goal for violence reduction is an essential component of a comprehensive plan for reducing violence in the St. Louis region. Without a concrete objective and benchmark for measuring progress, the plan will be directionless and inspire little public confidence. Public officials sometimes announce baseless crime reduction targets, especially around election time, such as “My plan will reduce crime by 50%.” For their part, law enforcement officials tend to shy away from specific reduction targets, fearing that if they fail to meet them, they will be open to criticism. Neither of these options contributes to violence reduction.

Announcing a specific violence-reduction goal and organizing planning and implementation strategies around it focuses the attention of stakeholders and is the best way to measure progress. How, then, should a credible, evidence-based violence-reduction goal be established? There are two methods which, ideally, should be used in combination. The first is look to periods in the recent past when violence has decreased and use them as the basis for targeting future reductions. The second is to monitor violence reduction strategies in regions similar to one’s own and adopt strategies shown to be effective elsewhere as best practices. While the two methods should be combined, for illustrative purposes we can use the recent St. Louis MSA violent crime and homicide trends as the basis for establishing a realistic reduction target.

Figures 6 and 1 display the trends in the St. Louis MSA violent crime and homicide rates between 2007 and 2020. Both rates began to increase after 2013. Before then, however, the rates fell. The violent crime rate decreased by 20% between 2007 and 2014. The homicide rate declined by a more modest 12%. Importantly, both drops persisted over several years and, therefore, offer a durable basis for projecting future declines. We do not know what local policies or programs, if any, might have led to these decreases. What is clear, however, is that our region’s recent history shows that appreciable multiyear violent crime reductions are certainly possible and can serve as credible guideposts for targeting future reductions.

Once a regional goal is set and committed to, there will need to be regional collaboration and mutual responsibility and accountability.

## NEXT STEPS

# 7

### [7.1] Commit to a Regional Homicide Reduction Goal

Regional leaders must make homicide and violence reduction a priority and establish a regional violence-reduction strategy.

The No. 1 step leaders can take to reduce violence is to set a clear goal and commit to saving lives. *“Preserving life by preventing lethal or near-lethal violence is the primary goal of any true anti-violence effort, and progress should be measured in concrete terms: fewer homicides and non-fatal shootings. City leaders should commit to tangible reductions in these measures.”*<sup>lxviii</sup> A regional homicide reduction goal should be set based on a credible, evidence-based method as described above.

Further, leaders must *“place responsibility for violence reduction efforts at the top”* of local government, law enforcement agencies, and community-based organizations.<sup>lxix</sup>

### [7.2] Development of a Long-Term Regional Strategy



As discussed previously, the St. Louis MSA has been the subject of crime reduction plans in the past. These reports contained some good ideas about how to reduce crime and violence, but none included an implementation strategy that would bring their recommendations to life and sustain the effort over time. Without concrete and detailed guidance about the institutional mechanisms needed to make crime reduction an ongoing top priority for government officials and community leaders, even the best plans will die on the vine. That, unfortunately, has been true of the past crime reduction plans for our region.

Experts such as Thomas Abt can provide guidance and best practices regarding implementation strategy.<sup>lxx</sup> The strategy requires buy-in from government and community leaders, continuous monitoring of real time crime data, rigorous policy and program evaluation, and revisions to crime reduction plans based on evaluation of results. The key to successful implementation is coordinated leadership from the top. In the St. Louis MSA, this

would require that chief elected officials and law enforcement leaders from around the region work together to implement and evaluate evidence-based strategies to reduce violent crime. To make sure coordinated violence reduction survives transitions in leadership and persists over the long term, leaders could consider establishing a regional Office of Violence Prevention with resources and authority needed to oversee violence reduction initiatives in the region. This office could have an advisory board that is representative of the diverse communities that make up the St. Louis MSA and that reports regularly to the public on progress in reducing violent crime in the region. We need a new regional approach.

## CONCLUSION

# 8

Reducing homicide and violence is essential for the health, vibrancy, and prosperity of the metro area. Regional governments, police, businesses, non-profits, and residents all have a role in reducing violence. GSL and the RBC urge our region's leaders to adopt a regional strategy to reduce homicide throughout the St. Louis MSA.

Our region must continue to work together to communicate, cooperate, and integrate resources across jurisdictions. This work should be done in the context of regional assessments including the 2015 Police Executive Research Forum report, St. Louis City and County Police Department Administrative Reviews in 2020 by Teneo, the work of Forward Through Ferguson, the Giffords Law Center to Reduce Gun Violence 2022 reports, and others.

Looking ahead to East-West Gateway Council of Governments' Regional Crime Summit, GSL and the RBC hope this white paper is valuable to leaders and stakeholders as background for this critical civic conversation. GSL and the RBC strongly support the adoption of a comprehensive regional strategy to reduce violence with a specific goal to reduce homicides.

## SOURCES

- <sup>i</sup> Note: The St. Louis, MO-IL Metropolitan Statistical Area includes: Bond County, IL; Calhoun County, IL; Clinton County, IL; Jersey County, IL; Macoupin County, IL; Madison County, IL; Monroe County, IL; St. Clair County, IL; Crawford County, MO (part—Sullivan city); Franklin County, MO; Jefferson County, MO; Lincoln County, MO; St. Charles County, MO; St. Louis County, MO; Warren County, MO; and St. Louis city, MO.
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