



CHOSTNER: Felony filings up statewide

JEFF CHOSTNER DEC 31, 2017

The Colorado District Attorney's Council has compiled statewide statistics regarding felony charge filings. In general, in the 22 judicial districts, felony filings statewide were up more than 27 percent during the two-year fiscal period from 2015 to 2017, with some jurisdictions as high as 30 percent to 60 percent. In Pueblo County, our felony filings are up 23 percent over this time in 2016 and 2016 had approximately a 13 percent increase over 2015. What this indicates is that there is a statewide increase in serious crimes and/or repeat offenders. In either case, the state criminal justice system is responding to this with the tools it has available to it.



Jeff Chostner

In Pueblo County, we review anywhere from 10,000 to 12,000 criminal offenses a year for potential charging. That number has stayed roughly the same for the past 15 years. What has changed is the number of cases that result in felony charging. As noted above, this reflects in my view either a more serious character of criminal offenders or more individuals involved in repeated criminal activity. That appears to be a statewide phenomenon.

But we are attacking crime in the courtroom with, I believe, positive effects for the community. For example, with regard to the most dramatic crime, homicide, there were 12 homicides in both 2014 and 2015. Thus far in 2017, there have been nine. That is an important decline in the most lethal crime and due primarily to excellent investigative work and successful prosecutions that have taken individuals disposed to murder off the streets.

There were 224 robberies in Pueblo in 2016. In the first half of 2017, we have seen an 11 percent drop in this type of crime. With regard to burglaries (home break-ins), there has been a two percent decrease each year from 2014 to 2016, constituting nearly an 12 percent year-over-year decrease. In the first half of this year, we've seen a 28 percent decrease from this time last year.

Even with manpower shortages in the Pueblo Police Department and this office, we've made progress against crime because of our joint cooperative efforts. The Safe Streets Task Force is a prime example of all of us in law enforcement coming together in a concentrated effort to take criminals off the streets of Pueblo and successfully prosecuting them. Not only have these arrests helped in those individual cases, it has led to resolution of other cases as well. We have successfully prosecuted high-profile cases.

Police Chief Troy Davenport, in association with Sheriff Kirk Taylor, Undersheriff J.R. Hall and Captain Dave Lucero, have worked superbly with the District Attorneys' Office to put the best possible law enforcement package on the streets of Pueblo. Special recognition needs to go to United States Attorney Bob Troyer and his primary representative in Pueblo, Brad Giles, for their help in prosecuting certain persons for crimes in federal district court in Denver. Giles has prosecuted in federal court crimes relating to drug sales and distribution, firearms violations, armed robberies and murder-for-hire cases. The reality of a defendant going to an out-of-state federal prison away from family is a sobering prospect and helps reduce continued crimes by criminal associates. Our hat is off to our friends in the federal criminal justice system who have been most helpful to Pueblo. Most recently, there have been discussions of bringing a federal magistrate to Pueblo so that we more efficiently prosecute federal offenses in Pueblo and not have to transport witnesses, defendants and attorneys out of county. I believe this would enhance our law enforcement presence in Pueblo and have an additional beneficial effect on reducing crime.

This collective effort is having an effect on crime in our community and you need to know about it. Though the Pueblo Police Department has a severe manpower shortage and my office has not been fully staffed in nearly three years, we all work together to make our hometown a safer community for all. We do this not only because it is right and just to do so, but because a safer community hopefully means a more prosperous one, as businesses will want to locate to our city.

Those of us in law enforcement and criminal justice are dedicated to making Pueblo County a better quality community through public safety. This joint effort has paid dividends thus far for Pueblo. We will continue to strive tirelessly for our fellow citizens as this is our town too -- and Pueblo County deserves that kind of effort.

Jeff Chostner is district attorney for the 10th Judicial District in Pueblo and is president of the Colorado District Attorneys Council. He is a retired colonel from the United States Air Force.
