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How to Stop Most Homicides in Baltimore

82% of Homicide Suspects Had Prior Convictions


ROCKVILLE, MD (July 11, 2022) — A new Maryland Public Policy Institute report titled Baltimore’s Preventable Murders reveals that most homicide defendants in Baltimore City would not have been free to commit their alleged homicides if not for lax sentencing for prior convictions.

Among 110 homicide suspects between January 2019 and July 2020, 77 had been previously convicted of a serious crime by Baltimore City State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby’s office since 2015. Of those 77 previously convicted, 61 (79%) of them faced statutory jail terms that should have kept them in prison beyond the date that they committed the subsequent alleged homicide.

The report also profiles five homicide defendants who allegedly killed within months of their prior conviction and sentencing. One suspect, James Dunbar, whose homicide case is still pending, was convicted of a handgun charge and released for time served less than three months before he is accused of killing a man in 2019. Another repeat drug and gun offender was convicted of dealing drug and violating his probation six months before he allegedly shot and killed someone in 2020.

“The citizens of Baltimore are bearing the violent burden of a state’s attorney who is failing to effectively prosecute and incarcerate violent offenders,” said report author Sean Kennedy, a visiting fellow at MPPI. “Because of lax plea agreements negotiated between convicted offenders and prosecutors, sentences often fall far short of the statutory sentencing guidelines for the crimes committed.”

These findings likely undercount the total number of homicide suspects in Baltimore City who have prior convictions. Much critical data to studying this trend is either not available to the public or remains obscured by improper data management.



Additionally, two-thirds of Baltimore’s annual murders go without an arrest. Whether the individuals who committed those unsolved crimes had prior convictions is, thus, unknowable until an arrest is made.

“The sad truth is, too many killers are free to continue to kill and maim other victims in Baltimore,” said Kennedy. “Not only are arrest rates too low for those who’ve committed homicide, but sentences for other violent offenders — who are likely to commit future homicides — are too often let free early.

“State’s Attorney Mosby must change her office’s proclivity for negotiating lax plea agreements so that violent offenders are not too soon freed to roam Baltimore’s streets and increase the ranks of the city’s killers.”

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