



Board of County Commissioners of Washington County, Maryland

Meeting Minutes and Transcript of the Recording

Recording of meeting available at: <https://youtu.be/9NpW9znprcg>

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND'S CITY OF HAGERSTOWN PUBLIC SAFETY DISCUSSION

At the Washington County Free Library

August 12, 2024 – 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

WELCOME

Senator Paul Corderman

PURPOSE AND MISSION

Short-Term and Long-Term Solutions

Senator Paul Corderman

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Business Community Perspective and Needs:

- Chamber of Commerce and Greater Hagerstown Committee
Jim Kercheval, Executive Director of the Greater Hagerstown Committee
Paul Frey, President and CEO, Chamber of Commerce
Senator Paul Corderman

Public Safety:

- Hagerstown Police Department Staffing and Supplemental resources from County and State Agencies
Chief Paul "Joey" Kifer, Hagerstown City Police
Brian Albert, Sheriff, Washington County Sheriff's Department
Lieutenant Brian Kloos, Maryland State Police
Lieutenant Colonel, Daniel Pickett, Maryland State Police
Senator Paul Corderman
Mayor Takesha Martinez, City of Hagerstown
Delegate Brooke Grossman
Vicki Sterling, Director of Behavioral Health, Washington County Health Department
Michelle Gordon, County Administrator, Washington County Government
Earl Stoner, Health Officer, Washington County Health Department
- Washington County Public Schools/City Walking Schools – Back to School Plan
Dr. David Sovine, Superintendent, Washington County Public Schools
Senator Paul Corderman
Brian Albert, Sheriff, Washington County Sheriff's Department
Chief Paul "Joey" Kifer, Hagerstown City Police

Health Department:

- Harm Reduction – Syringe Services Program

Earl Stoner, Health Officer, Washington County Health Department
Vicki Sterling, Director of Behavioral Health, Washington County Health Department
Senator Paul Corderman

ADJOURNMENT

Senator Corderman

John Barr, President, Washington County Board of County Commissioners
Michelle Gordon
Senator Corderman



Dawn L. Marcus, County Clerk

TRANSCRIPT OF THE RECORDING

Senator Paul Corderman: So everyone's pretty much here actually from individuals that reached out to us.

Individual: I think I saw Kristen here, Kristen Alshire did he make it in? He was sitting outside.

Commissioner Wayne Keefer: He's here for another meeting. He said he may come in.

Senator Corderman: No problem, I think some other folks may drop in, or not. I appreciate everyone taking the time to get together. I just want to lead this off with you know there is a lot of talk obviously in the community over the last several weeks and a lot of that, I probably started that, and I know that I probably ruffled a few feathers with some individuals in this room and the same time I want to put out there and I've had discussions some others my intent was never to shed a negative light on our city or on anyone in here in particular. It is to spur a conversation and hopefully facilitate that conversation into some sort of positive solutions, you know, a lot of things that happening as of recent and you know, I thought it would be best that if we could if we get together and hopefully have that conversation and again I wanted this to be focused on kind of a short term and potentially long-term solutions. I think everyone noticed the issues. I don't think anyone who's been in not only in this room or in this community knows it. We don't need to talk about all the different issues that happen in downtown as far as the homeless issues or the vagrancy or drug issues or crime or this that or another. We know what the issues are. It's how we're going to be able to confront those and, and move forward, you know, a lot of these things, you know, when they occur they become, you know, I will say clickbait per se but they get people very excited and that letter that I wrote obviously probably added fuel to that fire. But again, I reiterate the reason behind that was to help spur a conversation and I know I'm not wrong on that. I don't apologize for the letter because I know that the community is feeling this way. There may have been a better way to go about it. I will grant you that but at the same time I know that the greater part of our community feels this way and it is up to us and this room to figure out a path forward for those closed community members. Everyone kind of has a role in this. I've outlined a couple of brief things that I want to touch on as I want to kind of keep some kind of a structure to this. I also plan on this not being the last time hopefully this group gets together and or groups of the future. I think there's other ways potentially we could do that as far as depending on what the issues are and they obviously didn't bring the nonprofit community and there's probably more conversation with the faith-based community and things that nature but the immediate thing I think of what everyone sees the from their face has a lot to do with public safety and the challenges that are associated with that. So before we kind of get into that, that specific part of it. I wanted to hear from or let the group here from I guess Paul and Kerch briefly as far as the businesses again. We don't need a laundry list of horror stories or what's happened or this, that or another. We know there's challenges depending on where your businesses located in the city, but I guess trying to identify what the needs are so that we can kind of combat that with art, you know, we need this. What do we need as far as from a staffing standpoint from public safety standpoint to deliver that needs so I guess from real quick. I ask Paul and Kerch if you want to go ahead and to dive in real quick as far as what you're hearing from the business community what that need maybe and then we've got to go in towards more of the public safety portion of it with the city police and the county and state.

Jim Kercheval, Executive Director, Greater Hagerstown Community (GHC): Just to be quick thanks for everyone here and I'll put out what I can it is directly as a I can, but from the business community's perspective and GHC we've looked a long time trying to have a vibrant downtown core and that's a big

part of our economic development needs etc. There's a variety of different research articles we've looked at that provides a traits of what is a successful downtown with a look at the best downtowns in the country. They all have certain traits in common and I'm happy to share those with some of those articles with you and you have them but a lot of that is just having a critical mass of business, having a residential, residential development that's got a variety income level, you don't want all vulnerable or all other you want a variety of income levels that there's disposable income walking downtown it talks about having evening traffic trying to have a place that's open, you know eighteen hours a day seven days a week, that's vibrant and when you kind of look at our community, at least when we kind of take a look back at our community you know, the positive news is our community could check a lot of these boxes off that are listed traits in a positive way some of the areas where we go, as we got to you know improve our diversity in the residential development. We got to improve some of the amount of business we have. You know thirty of the businesses should be open at night and we aren't there yet. But we're working in that direction and then you know, what are the some of the cornerstones of things that makes it happen and you know when this topic comes up a lot but I mean, it's always about having that safe environment where business people can open their business, work where the customers feel comfortable coming downtown, and you know, just try to, you know create that type of lifestyle also just the cleanliness of the areas if we got certain areas we're trying to target or invest in that we need to try to invest in those areas to make those areas look sharp, you know, nice light and street lighting things like that. Some of those things we've done, you know things with like the murals that some great, great initiatives, you know, just another good example, we spent the ninety million in the new stadium you know, you have this perception that downtown's unsafe and I know when somebody's worked here for twenty five years, I don't feel that way. But at the same time there are certainly things that happened at if you're not used to coming downtown and get make you nervous. But what we saw there with the police and Chief Kifer's work when the city police came in there. They had a big presence that they showed they got the drones flying and we heard a lot of positive feedback about wow the police really are being active down here. I thought that was a good positive example what that enhanced presence can do to help slowly change some the mindsets and the like. So, you know, we're here to be part of the solution, you know, but just basically, you know, what can we do from a capital side to help him improve the overall way that downtown looks, the areas we're trying to attract investment doesn't mean that area is worth any more or less than other parts of the neighborhood. But you know where we're trying to bring people downtown. We need to make sure that we have that the right kind of environment, anything we can do to help we're here for and I guess, that's it.

Paul Frey, CEO, President, Chamber of Commerce: Not to be repetitive our growth model like Jim said from greater Hagerstown and, and our perspective. It's more about perception and a lot of times a reality. And so I think what we can do as an organization and as a group collaboration, is look at the image of the brand and talk about all the good things that happen course not all that gets out there more of the bad things get out there. So I think it's more about perception. It's work. An image and brand and our approach on the board of directors for the Chamber, are very strong on this is be solution-focused verses problem focus. We know all the problems what are some of the solutions we can work on together future focus versus focus on the past. There's a saying why the windshield is so much bigger than the rearview mirror you want to look forward and what are the opportunities and I think collaboration is important with the business and nonprofit community, you know, one thing couple things Jim mentioned cleanliness and lighting, I know We did it to chamber. We lit up our front areas at nighttime. It looked better. We have lights on at the front of our office. I think that goes a long way then cleanliness is important as a business community, you know picking up our own little area. I know the city has folks out there, but they're not out there 24/7. So I think we could do a better job of that as a business community and one of the areas of one of the area's is the alleys it is my understanding that the city doesn't really own the alleys or take care of the alleys, the businesses need to work together on

that partnership. So again, our board stands ready to help on the solutions, it's a team effort and there's a lot more good happening than not as a, as a group we need to focus on that and it work on the areas that every community deals with whether you're in Hagerstown or Frederick or New York. So we stand ready, and we look forward to working in partnership with the team here.

Jim Kercheval: I'll make just one more comment. But one thing I think that would help is it was we're all trying to see where to put our own resources to try to make things better if we all were operating off the same page of data and metrics. So what, what are the stats were trying to track and you know, are we really tracking the results of when we put in new programs out of they work? How do they not work? But if we all kind of had that same set of metrics and goals that were trying to you know, go after. It has we make our own decisions within our own organizations. We can kind of weigh those against that set of goals or this set of statistics and say are they going to help here and if we just got all new which one? Hey you see a lot of stuff flying around from the different groups and organizations. And I don't know, you know, what are the ones that we all want to say? Okay. These are ones that we have faith in. These are the metrics who want to start tracking and then as we put our policies and our own resources to what priorities we want to work on. How does that fit into that framework for peace.

Paul Frey: Jim brought this up. We need to be advocates. I say this a lot of chamber events. We need to be advocates for Washington County and Hagerstown. I have a friend who lives in Frederick and she came to a ball game. It was parked at such a lot that she said I want to leave early because I got to get to my car and I'm where I said stop Mary, it's fine, number one you're safe. There's police presence out here. So I think we need to be advocates when we see or hear something or see something that may not be accurate. We need to stand up for our city and our community. So again, sometimes it takes a little bit of guts. But I think that's what we need to do as well.

Senator Corderman: What I perceive that I think are a couple of key things that came out of both of those points were only three things. You talked about safe environment, talked about cleanliness, and talked about perception. To your last point about advocate, I think it you know perception is, you know what it is so to speak. The perception is in this community unfortunately people don't feel safe in the community, not everybody but that is that is the perception and so we need to figure out a way whether it's you know, the brand marketing, they're advocating, all those different things all play into it, but we got to figure out a way to if it is just perception I know the chief has gone over crime statistics in the past and things that nature and they've been pretty steady over the years. They go up and down you have a couple blips here and there but if the overall perception is I'm not going downtown because of you know, x y and z. We got to figure out a way to become more positive about that and hopefully, you know take that perception away and so to me part of that goes into that when we talked about that safe environment. Okay, and so I'll try to steer this over towards Chief Kifer and let him kind of introduce a few days as we've talked about before we talked about staffing and some of the challenges that you're experiencing and how that has kind of affected positively or negatively just because whatever the challenge the department has had in regards to their staffing to be able to have a more highly visible police force so to speak so okay.

Chief Paul Joey Kifer, Hagerstown Police Department (HPD): Well, there's no secret to anybody in this room that we've been struggling for about five years now, so when George Floyd and covid hit there was a massive problem. Legislation changed, policing became a targeted sport against everyone against us, you know not everyone but people against us that caused several people to retire. You know law enforcement all together so they didn't have to face that. What I will say is that there's challenges are such that we're getting numbers coming in. I'll give you a number from just last year. We had three hundred fifty-six people put in that they wanted to apply for the police department actually, actually

put into our system that they want to come test. Not everybody did not everybody showed up but we hired nineteen people of those three hundred some people. I think you talk to my counterparts over here those numbers are probably about the same for them in terms of percentage of your get. People can't get through the process. It's not like hiring someone to go out and you know, I'm not, no harm intended here anybody else but go out and dig a ditch somewhere. It's just, it's just not so and we're competing with all the other police agencies for that very small pool of people that are capable to be eligible to be police officers. So that number is really small. So when you're looking at I need people, MSP just canceled their academy and I heard because they needed four people in it and they cancelled it, is that correct.

Lieutenant Brian Kloos, Maryland State Police (MSP): No, we had twenty-two in the class.

Chief Kifer: But numbers are down from what you usually have. So those are, those are things, the last academy you guys didn't have very many in it but this academy you do.

Sheriff Brian Albert, Washington County Sheriff's Office (WCSO): Last academy we had two, this academy we have nine.

Chief Kifer: Last academy we had, we had eight. This academy we have two so those numbers ebb and flow based upon just who comes through your door and who gets through the process. So currently of eighty-one officers that I have hired there either in the academy or they are in field training. So I have seventy, seventy one actionable operational members right now. Some are out on maternity some are out with medical. So I got seventy one officers. I got thirty officers in patrol right now. So those numbers aren't going to grow become fast for me. We can chart out all of our progresses to look forward. So even if I don't lose a single person between now to get the ninety-one which is my -- strength, it'll take me two years. Why is that two years if I hire someone today the next academy doesn't start until January that academy lasts six months and they have four months of field training. Those numbers progress out. So unless I can steal from these guys to get people that are already certified I am two years out from getting the ninety one by going the traditional route of hiring someone in and putting them through the academy. We've offered signing bonuses of twenty thousand dollars for lateral people within state of Maryland to come work for us. We've offered ten thousand dollars for people that are considered certifiable from outside of Maryland. So typically, Pennsylvania is the main source and we've picked up a handful over the last couple of years. Reasons why they don't want to move, too far away where -----in Pennsylvania every single police academy that they hold up there they are self sponsored. We've had people come down ride with us. We've had people get in our background process and then the last minute they choose not to their families were up there. So they don't want to move this far away to be away from their families. We have hired people to get into the academy months ahead of the academy even starts, why because they've applied to multiple agencies at the same time and if I wait till closer to the academy to hire you you've already chosen to go somewhere else. And in that process just last year alone we had four people that we had hired went to the academy because I was supposed to have twelve in the academy last year, four quit before the academy started two weeks before the academy started they decided that wasn't for them. So the challenges are we have a society that I think talking to other people in here and are in businesses are suffering the same consequences people don't want to work like before the work ethics has changed but getting into law enforcement is extremely hard. That pool of people has really canceled itself out in large part in the last four or five years. It's starting to come back. We're starting to see, you know, better numbers of people coming in and testing and but to look at three hundred some people last year and hired nineteen. I mean, that's just where we are. So we try to stay competitive and we have a collective bargaining agreement that we have to go by its a three year contract that contract comes up at July it ends in July. So the union will

be negotiating a new contract for new pay and benefits and whatever else they want, but we're kind of locked into that as an agency in the city. So those are the challenges that we have. So we're competing with other agencies with bigger budgets we will go above the Sheriff's department, you know next year we might get above them and then they negotiate and get above us. Just a leapfrog in effect that is happening. We are not far we are far enough away from the DC metropolitan area that has a lot more money and can pay a lot more. But if you look at Montgomery County to our advertising up here, why is Montgomery County Police Department advertising in Washington County? They can't find people they pay better and I'm not hearing people run down there to that this is the competition we have. Frederick is just across the mountain. I've lost quite a few to Frederick. Their starting salary is a seventy-one thousand dollars we start at fifty four thousand. That's, that's just where we are mean and that's not something that I blame the city council or anybody else for their tax base can afford that. I'm a realist I know where we stand there. I've done as much as I could do within my budget over the last couple years to take money that was generated for staffing. I was staffed at one hundred and twelve, but I wasn't at one hundred and twelve. I was at ninety-five I couldn't get past that mark and I was losing people I was losing people to Frederick and to the Sheriff's department and other places at record numbers and I need to stop that, because again bringing somebody new in takes me two years trying to save somebody from leaving and that benefits us. We repurposed salary savings by taking that budget money that one hundred and twelve knocked it back to one hundred and four at the time to put money in the pockets of the guys that were here working every day. So they would not want to leave for better money and for other reasons and those efforts along with contractual changes that we had the last contract. Some of these guys got you know, a twenty five percent pay raise. I mean a lot of money for that. So it really stopped that flow of people leaving for all these other reasons. Now I'm losing people for what I have told you they get in here in the academy and they quit before the academy starts, they quit they can't make it through the academy. These are the reasons why the staffing level is where it is at. We get our hopes up we have twelve people going into the academy and they walk out with seven and then soon as they walk out one of them quits within a month of field training. So I'm left with six. So those are the kind of numbers that frustrates us but not because of a lack of trying and not because of lack of effort we have it's just what happens. So that's, that's my staffing.

Senator Corderman: So to shape within that to me sounds like long-term to your thinking to put a long-term issue and challenge to try to get to and in between that you have a union negotiation, you talked about being competitive trying to get us around here. So I think that's a long-term conversation prior to long-term solution. Not with just the department but with the Mayor and Council for consideration of how you guys are going to you kind of attack that over the next few negotiation what that competitive pay may or may not look like based on those jurisdictions. I'd be curious at some point, I don't expect you guys to have that number now but as you're getting further in this conversation of where you rank or say with other agencies in you know, 30-40-50, mile radius and what would it take? What would the impact be on the city's budget if you raised that out and understanding it wouldn't just be the starting salary because you got everybody else on board also it shows you the whole wage pressure you have to raise them also, but what does that number look like when we talk it is a million dollars to ten million dollars is what, what is that? What is that impact and is it sustainable to the city budget or not or so again, that's something for obvious the Mayor and Council to tackle at the appropriate time. And that's more private long-term thing and in the short-term were talking about you mentioned thirty patrol officers. All right, you mentioned your down to seventy-one number to get ninety five is one of your city department is left. So short-term what can we do, I guess collectively, that's why both these other agencies I had hoped to have this conversation with the Sheriff and the State Police as far as because again, this could take a long time to fill those positions regardless of pay or not. In the meantime what can we do or what can be done from the community aspects what these other agencies departments have done and that's where I'll look to the Sheriff and to the Lieutenant of is there an opportunity here.

Is it an ability for the county to provide, you know, a deputy or two or the state police to supplement your patrol to have more visible force and to compliment the men and women you have already as we're going forward. So I guess its an open ended question to the Sheriff and Lieutenant. I know there's been some conversation last week a to run some traffic stops here and their stuff like that. But if you have thirty in patrol, I'm assuming that you can control your own the three shifts, right?

Chief Kiser: There's three shifts of six.

Senator Corderman. There's just a six and so that's if there are six available. If someone's out or sick then your running four or five.

Chief Kiser: No, we are always running six.

Sheriff Albert: There is a minimum of six.

Lieutenant Kloos: Same with us.

Senator Corderman: So six is for the entire city?

Chief Kifer: Yes.

Senator Corderman: Including downtown, North End of town, and West End the entire city?

Chief Kifer: That doesn't count a specialized unit that doesn't count narcotics task force agents that doesn't count my detectives. So those were separate and not counting the SRO's those are separate from the patrol.

Senator Corderman: Just for understanding if a call happens whether it's in whatever end of town it is and an officer shows up and they want back up working with a two or three people on one call, in essence you have two or three people left for the entire city that's very challenging. You know, I'm not criticizing. It's just the reality of what it is. And so that's why I'm asking is there an opportunity for some supplemental help potentially from the county or the state? So I guess I'll kind of

Chief Kifer: Let me speak up for that. So yes, six isn't a number we want to be at but it never has been but it's where we've been for the last seven or eight years. It's just where we are. What we've done. Yes, what we've done is we have created things like our watch center that takes about thirty percent of the calls for service off of the men and women on the street to allow them to handle those more in depth calls, so they're not all bogged down with the calls that tie them up that doesn't need to be. So we created that and we are meeting our goal of about thirty percent of calls of service --- that reduce that call strain. When we purchased the drones that was done just for a specific reason of the dirt bikes that was done that was the catalyst for it, but there's drones fly every day and they take the place for certain kind of calls that will take the place of six to eight officers depending on the kind of call so, we're finding the, trying to find mitigating ways of doing that. We hired our very first part-time police officer -- Robinson he's been working for us he comes in and works for about twenty hours a week for us fully certified we give him targeted approaches to work on. So we met with the Sheriff and Lieutenant Kloos and MSP staff three weeks ago. I think it was to discuss an option of how they could help us with some things moving forward what we spoke about then was coming in and doing some targeted traffic stops in some targeted areas for us. Areas that we know are our biggest concerns right now to help us out in

those areas for visibility purposes. And they've agreed to do that. I'm going to let you guys talk about what that impact is for you guys.

Senator Corderman: Real quick before you do that Brian you talked about earlier to the Chief about six people has been adequate.

Chief Kifer: Not adequate.

Senator Corderman: But that is what you been using though. You said you've been making it, getting by with that.

Chief Kifer: Because the Union contract decided that's what they wanted to meet to the, get time off.

Senator Corderman: But I guess what I would push back on that is and just not just from the role I'm in now in Annapolis because the citizens expectation that there is a more highly visible police in the community than six people on any given night. And so I was in the --- of great because I am a huge fan of that and they can from a policing standpoint help alleviate some of the pressures I'm all for that what you still need people in the community. You still need people to do that.

Chief Kifer: I'm not denying that.

Mayor Takesha Martinez, City of Hagerstown: May I please, may I please, because if we're talking about perception and so if I could just really quickly when you say community and the greater part of community, what do you mean by that? And another thing I'm going to ask to is that whenever you talk about the community in the perception of downtown in a perception of police. I would like to know like who are you talking to because outside of being the Mayor as a conflict resolution person. I've worked very closely with the police department for many years and I have to tell everyone in this room HPD went from not being able to come on Jonathan Street and get one phone I mean one person to talk to them to where the Community is now offering water. So when we talk about five years ago and the things that have happened there's been a lot of work done to build up relationships in Community. Another thing that is that happens often is that we come together whenever things happen in crisis. There's a, there's communities that are experiencing a lot of violence and a lot of death and when I talk to those folks what I hear is not that there's if they don't feel safe, it's not that it's, that it's the cost of living is the different things that are happening within their finances. So my perception from the ground level before being Mayor from the ground level is that people are starting to care more about their city people are starting to care more about the downtown Hagerstown area. Another thing people are coming downtown more. It's very difficult to convince folks that they can come downtown and support businesses. When you have a social media perception that we are unsafe that we don't get along. That this is what that, that's a different type of perception. So I want to throw that perception into the middle of this room because it's very hard to get diverse leadership. Look around the room. Diversity, it's councilwoman Burnett and myself. It's very hard. And I'm sorry, and Earl, but it's very hard to convince people which is my job as the Mayor is to convince people that this is a place where all leadership is accepted all voices are heard. It's very hard to do that if they can Google Hagerstown and look up all of the things and see leadership fashion the community leaders that are here when every single day someone is calling one of the officers in community. It didn't happen before and saying this is what's happening on my block. And so I want to make sure that that's an understanding in this room as well. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Corderman: I appreciate that. I'm sure there have been great strides have been made in the last couple years I guess but I was that as regardless of what were talking what we talked about this room right now. We're talking about any business or any personal village or whatever we can always be striving to do better. So I'm not saying that

Mayor Martinez: I'm not taking it away that we're not but I just think, I think that you didn't reflect that back from the business community whenever they said the great things and that I just feel like there's a, there's a, there's a pounce on how could you make this look as if we haven't been making strides? That's how I feel.

Senator Corderman: Counterpoint, we've lost 25% of our police department.

Mayor Martinez: And he just explained why.

Senator Corderman: Oh I know, I get that.

Mayor Martinez: I don't want this to turn into me and you so I am gonna fall back and I just wanted to say, thank you.

Senator Corderman: I want to get this back to finding solutions. How do we find potential short-term solution towards that long-term problem of your staffing.

Delegate Brooke Grossman: Can I ask a question, just a clarifying question only because I was in a different meeting with you a couple of weeks ago and I'd be here is from, from all law enforcement because you're all getting calls that are not law enforcement calls, right? But then when you do have six officers or eight officers or what do you guys have like four across the highway or something throughout every day, right? So there's four for the whole I-70 versus six for the city of Hagerstown, but when you're getting called for things that aren't necessarily, um law enforcement-related and it was a pretty astronomical number. There you go. Thank you. It's late in the day, the amount of time that your officers were spending responding to things that really don't need you. So when you're talking about short-term needs and probably even long-term solutions. Well yes more officers is going to do great. We don't need them to get called for things that they're not needed to. So what additional support beyond more officers do you need from the community to create? Like I was just in Winchester last week, right and part of the way their city has started to respond if they have a dedicated EMS unit that doesn't get called with 911 they're just out in the community all day every day and that has diverted those police calls because they go directly to that unit and that unit calls the nonprofit, you know what I mean, and does that. So beyond just for officers more officers, more officers, more laws to lock people up, which is not going to help us be successful at but that's my opinion also, I will say that. What else is going to make your jobs doable with the staff that you have and with the resources we already have available in the community to you.

Chief Kifer: Well, the number you're talking about is we ran anecdotal and is not absolute. I don't want to say the scientifically, we looked at it very quickly, but for the first six months of this year, we spent eight years of man-hours on social issue calls homelessness, addiction, mental health kind of calls, non-criminal type of calls. We spent eight years of man hours in six months. So that is very taxing. And that number has as in our meeting we had before, you know, the bigger issue the thing that we deal with the most are the social issue type calls. That's just what we do.

Vicki Sterling, Director of Behavioral Health, Washington County Health Department: I would like to say something because we do have programs in place, but I don't think that they're utilized to the fullest potential. So we have CID we have lead we have been talking to Dave Chisholm at the county to do the mobile unit and that's something we really would like to do and I think at one point in time they kind of had it all written up and drafted but for some reason it just stopped. They're doing it in Frederick and they're only they have a dedicated I think sixteen hours to the induction that they're doing and then the rest it's another mobile unit that's successful. So those are things that are already there it's just they're not being utilized to the fullest potential.

Chief Kifer: We're starting our own alternative response team so Ashley Roush right now is the one and only along with a CRO, Community Resource Officer. We're getting ready to hire our first civilian position to do that in the social worker realm so they can do things that we can't do and those will be calls that surface that we don't have sent our guys to but again right now to speak to people and an SRO or a CRO that will be there for more than security reasons on a lot of those calls. So that's something for trying.

Delegate Grossman: Yeah. I'm just asking because I think it's important to recognize that we are not going to law enforcement our way out of this. --- so what else the DRC Drug Court or other things that we should be talking about in this conversation of how we better utilize some of those resources that are available to us in addition to finding new officers.

Senator Corderman: No, I don't disagree with that. I think that hopefully as ---- the non-profit community and the faith-based community along with the Health Department that's a bigger conversation --- but whatever the calls --- it sounds like you guys are just chasing calls right now. You don't have the ability to be chasing social issues and tracing calls you don't have to do is run the manpower you don't have the staff you down to a third patrol officer for the entire city. What can we do to fix that short-term now?

Chief Kifer: That's one of the -- person that's one of my task force guys in our precinct to be in the city working on the street Brian and I talked about that, that's how the taskforce works so there're not just dealing with confidential informants and making by they're actually going out and targeting areas of the -- the county and the city. Mostly the city is we've had some things in the county to go after those bad actors that we know are out there. Once we have Intel

Senator Corderman: When folks call 911, you're using NTF now for street crimes is that what you are getting to?

Chief Kifer: Yes, they're ad hoc, it's not full in the city all of the time because they have responsibilities in the county as a whole too being the Narcotics Task Force for Washington County but yes, they're in every homicide, every shooting we've ever had since in the recent past. Our narcotics guys are in the city working hand-in-hand with everyone else on the scene and then carrying that forward so they may be reacting at that incident, but then they're moving forward with any intelligent to get off that things that lead into other people that are there dealing with guns or drugs. They're going after those targets then based upon what happened in that instance. So it's proactive or reactionary based to some extent.

Senator Corderman: anyway, I will kick it over to the Sheriff and Lieutenant and obviously we would encourage any chime in from the Commissioner President or County Administrator what type of assistance can the county provide from your department Sheriff to the city to help alleviate with some of the staffing shortages.

Sheriff Albert: One thing that I think of a perception is maybe in this room or maybe in the public is that we don't work together, but I know that we worked together on a lot of things that go unnoticed, the Narcotics Task Force, the academy, Special Response Team I think they're out there serving a warrant currently. So we work together on the Narcotics Task Force we had the one murder downtown a recent all the guys went to county guys the city guys they were on that, scene security, gathering evidence, writing search warrants. So I mean we're handling it we couldn't operate without the city officers and I don't think that it would be very difficult for them to operate without us. So some of the things that we did do this on just the presence that we put downtown with some usually four to twelve shift that when the, you know, we were lacking that presence and so when we're doing an hour a day, more if we can and but we're putting them in those targeted areas that Captain Langston and Chief Kifer came up with and we've had some successful getting so, you know, we obviously had presence down there we're making traffic stops, you know, I can let the state talk about what they can do. But you know one thing that the Chief talked about we're at six deputies for the whole county. That's our minimum manpower and we're at, we're at that about every day right now. We are close to fully staffed. We had one hundred and seven authorized positions, but we have eleven of those are not active right now two of them are vacancies and nine of them are in the academy and their nine months from in the street by the time they're off their NPO's you know, something else the Digital Forensics Unit that we have. We have three deputies assigned to that. We do all the child pornography for the whole county that, you know, it helps the city with reduced. They don't have to worry about that. The state they passed along we work hand-in-hand with some of the state of digital, digital forensics to take care of that and it's huge. It would blow your mind the amount of those that we get a week. It, I was amazed, you know talking about some of the challenges. I'll just give you my experience, when I was hired with the state of Maryland there were sixteen hundred people to test for ten positions and I always said when I was in the academy for the top ten I'd hate to see the bottom ten. So that was a joke you guys can laugh, lighten the mood a little bit and the Colonel can tell you and Lieutenant Kloos can tell you now, the numbers that State Police when I was hired in 1991 were probably around two thousand, eighteen hundred to two thousand. What we got now is about fourteen hundred. So it's everywhere across law enforcement. We just took interviewed a lateral from Cambridge. Their prime is really bad in Cambridge for some reason. They're down thirty officers that's more than half of their police force, it's not just here. I don't know the solution to it. I think the pendulum starts to swing back up. Just getting as Chief said getting them in the door. I know one of the hurdles that we've had in the last two years is, is we have these kids that are coming out of high school or college and they come in and apply and they smoked marijuana within the last year and it wipes them right off it disqualifies them and we have to try to get that message out to the population. We're trying to hit people at younger ages and I'm sure the Chief is too, at those Middle School ages to bring them up through the ranks if that's what if they do want to do a career in police in law enforcement that you know, we kind of get them on the right track. So there are some things that we're dealing with I think initially I mean everybody in just on any given night, six, six and three so we're fifteen deputies, Hagerstown City officers and state troopers on the road. Now like I say, that's patrol only that's no specialized units.

Chief Kifer: That's not supervision.

Sheriff Albert: Yes, that's not supervision.

Senator Corderman: I get that. Yeah, then you guys well it's a lot to cover a lot of area to cover right and again maybe I'm wrong, maybe the community is not even aware, I say there is expectations of more and I get all of the challenges that I got to sort of figure out a way how to work through that. So, I mean, I appreciate everyone who he said yes and folks going in and kind of an hour or two here and

there I guess is that so not personally related but is that the best the county you can do basically an hour or two to have someone come in at the city which again is a part of the county.

Sheriff Albert: Yeah. We're trying to do some other things Senator we're also working some joint, you know, and I know they're taxed or even more having guys work overtime because they're getting mandated to work for manpower so the State and County were working together for special enforcement and targeted the Hagerstown outskirts so we're still, you know, like forty, so we're visible and we can help if someone gets in trouble, you know, that's the biggest thing. We want to make sure everybody here. I'll tell you what we want our people to go home every night. That's the first and foremost is this community and police safety. So we will, we will look at it and see if we can you know, there's anything we push anymore. The biggest thing that we have is there are so many opportunities for overtime that it's just taxing the people that we have, you know, and I'm sure the Chief and the state will tell you the same thing and they get tasked with the with the highway construction zones.

Michelle Gordon, County Administrator, Washington County Government: And from the Board's perspective they're absolutely 100% committed to making sure that the city succeeds. I think at this point, you know staff would need to bring that back and take a look at it. Analyze it determine the cost because ultimately there is a cost to providing these additional services inside of the city limits so we would need to

Senator Corderman: A cost that the city resident is paying for that's a deeper conversation, -- divide, this is a Washington County problem.

Michelle Gordon: City residents are given a discount. City residents are given a discount on their taxes for duplicative services, which is the police department. So, you know at this point we would need to bring that back at the staff level to analyze it to determine the cost to determine what the funding source would be and then get the Board approval for any additional services. So, like I said, the Board is absolutely 100% committed to ensuring that the city succeeds, but we need to determine the cost of that.

Senator Corderman: Ok.

Sheriff Albert: I'll just give you an estimate that I had a couple numbers from some of another meeting, but and I'm sure the Chief would agree with this with there's, our numbers in 2023. We ran an eighty-four thousand calls for service with one hundred and seven sworn deputies. And we're looking at ninety-four thousand this year. It's just going up and I think some of it is as a Delegate Grossman said people are calling 911 for anything. They don't know where else to send them. You know, I've heard somebody makes the statement the police is the and this is no disrespect to anybody who were the only were the only place that never closes. We have to respond.

Senator Corderman: The same challenges at the hospitals, everybody shows up to the ER for other issues.

Sheriff Albert: Yes. Everybody has such a challenge. The CID we're working with, Vicki, I didn't know that it kind of stalled out. I'll make sure that we push that a little bit with them.

Vicki Sterling: Yeah, we've done a huge push right for here for it to be 24/7, right? You know, that definitely is a definitely a viable short-term

Sheriff Albert: Because I know we were working on that with the 911 center. We'll make sure that I spark that conversation as you know

Vicki Sterling: And so they really expanded it. So it's available 24/7 right and sometimes they run short staffed to because that's not the greatest job in the world. But you know, they're licensed clinicians and they can respond with an officer.

Earl Stoner, Health Officer, Washington County Health Department: And these programs can be short-term solutions because they're already in place. It's not like a matter of development. It's just a matter of utilization to get it back on track.

Senator Corderman: To keep it going Lieutenant what with the state police aspects of some of the things as the Sheriff was saying. It sounds like you're pretty strapped also as far as manpower. So is there any of availability or resources to supplement or compliment?

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Picket, MSP: So let me step in, I am Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Pickett, I oversee all of the barracks across the state. So I have got nine hundred and thirty six uniformed troopers across twenty two barracks. Each barrack is strapped, a lot of communities are facing challenges. The Chief's right, recruiting is very difficult were about 80% right now. We're trying to get a class started in January that called for fifty and right now we've got about thirty additional officers offers. That doesn't mean they're going to make it means that they've gone halfway through the process and looks like they're going to. We have a great working relationship with the Chief here and Sheriff. Me and the Sheriff talk about once every two weeks. At the beginning of the year the Sheriff reached out to and asked if I could do more for Washington County, I said absolutely, what do you need. Since then I assigned investigators teaching operations group to assist others the chief there at his disposal pretty much.

Senator Corderman: Are you utilizing those Chief?

Chief Kifer: Yes, they are in the city all of the time.

Colonel Pickett: I have assigned a trooper to the ATF up here. We have a great working relationship. There are challenges ahead of us or most I'll will support the county and local police as much as I can.

Senator Corderman: As far as manpower and resources that we were talking about earlier. Do you have the ability of just from what we hear you say four or six people patrolling the, for the county, do you have at least the potentially doing what the sheriff's talking about bringing someone in to do calls every now and then whether it's an hour or two a day or any type of I guess probably anything would help.

Lieutenant Brian Kloos (MSP): I move resources around daily, I mean daily I, we've decided in the next couple of weeks we're going to double our initiatives focusing on feeder routes in and out of the city. We've been doing one a month. So that's seven we've done this year. We're going to double up to two a month that's directed enforcement to help put a uniform presence in and around the city.

Chief Kifer: But I do believe we're tagging up with them to --. We're going to be doing some on the city side as well.

Lieutenant Kloos: But I do believe that the citizens of Hagerstown want to see their police officers in the city, I do believe that. We will be their support as needed, in and out, that's what the citizens they want to see Hagerstown's Police Department.

Senator Corderman: See I don't disagree with that. But when I hear stuff like two years, two years if everything goes according to plan which quite frankly that's conversation that's been going on for the last eight or nine years. I've been involved in some sort of local politics per se and staffing retention has always been a challenge whether it's whatever in the spectrum has always been a challenge we do we know that. So yes I appreciate that, I'm saying in the immediate short term that we want to see HPD officers in the city of Hagerstown. But if we get help from the county and the Sheriff that's what I'm asking for on behalf of the citizens of yourself. They are our constituents. Go ahead, sorry Mayor.

Mayor Martinez: I just want to because I agree that the visibility and patrol makes people feel safer. I definitely feel safer in my community when I know that there is know someone patrolling especially as a woman that you know, does the work that I do. So I agree. However, I just want to, I want to ask the folks that are here to do this work. How long is it taking to solve crimes is it and also how long does it take to get the bad person off the street once they've shot or committed some act, I said shot or shooting or committed some act of violence because I think that if we, if we, if we look at the investigations and how long is taken, I'm just wondering if the perception of unsafety has a lot to do with depending on who you are and where you live and when I say that I, I mean I come downtown I go to church Downtown. I've been working actively with police and public safety for ten years on mediation and, and helping build relationships. And I don't there's a lot of things that are happening that I'm not used to and my kids are not used to however, I'm not getting the sense that were unsafe from the community around me. I have a woman that lives on Locust Street. She's able to call someone from HPD and had they come immediately to move people from in front of her house. There's, there's people in community members that will come and talk with you guys about how they don't care anymore. They will send pictures they will send videos they will talk to police on their porch in front of people. And so I hear, I hear everyone in the room. But again, I want to know like does it depend on who you are because when we're navigating downtown, I don't see any of the folks feeling unsafe. Actually four thousand people on the street three days a week has made the downtown much safer.

Senator Corderman: I would agree with that as far as the Mayor has talked about before and what has been done at Meritus Park as promised.

Mayor Martinez: And that took away from of patrol too. So then you have a community only seeing

Senator Corderman: It's not patrol there.

Mayor Martinez: Not Patrol. I'm sorry, but you had let me just say this with perception you had community that was coming down to baseball games and they were seeing tons of police which perceived to be patrol and not police in their community. And so we, we addressed that we address, address that with Captain Langston and the Lieutenant we address what that meant to the community that I hear. Yeah it's for visibility, but they're still patrol in your communities. So these are conversations that happen often with community.

Senator Corderman: I agree with that and I think like to see that expand up to a larger footprint of the city than just the immediate downtown area around the ballpark and how do we work towards that, that's what I'm saying? As far as whether you're in the South or the West End, the Jonathan Street

Community, North, wherever you are people want to feel that same people and they feel that now I'm not naive to think we're going to have a police officer in every corner that's just not reality.

Mayor Martinez: Senator what people are you talking to because I'm a I mean I just ask that generally because all of the folks that I'm I go and I talk with have never seen or met someone that is in leadership before when I'm sitting in a community with a police officer and we are talking whether it's Locust Street, whether it's the South End or Mulberry or whether it's all the way out by Fountainhead. They are saying we have never had anyone show up. Me and Langston just showed up at someone's house on Mitchell Avenue. And so I'm just and, and they are willing to work with the police. So there's a lot of question around my leadership on social media and there's a lot of question around my leadership across the state and I just want to know like how can we make it better with the things that we've done to help build up so that you don't get where community is actively working against the business community. Because now you have folks supporting business community. And so I just I also want to make sure that as far as the media back there gets my, my voice recorded, because I talk to people and I'm in the community every single day and I just there is folks that don't feel safe there, I get that too and we show up at their doorstep show us what you need.

Senator Corderman: That's why I'm speaking of what, what that expectation is. Maybe you're talking to different folks that I'm talking to. I can't tell you that we can have a meeting. I don't think it'd be very productive.

Mayor Martinez: I don't think so either.

Senator Corderman: We could advertise in the paper. I think you'd have a line up and down this

Mayor Martinez: no, but I don't think it'd be very productive but

Senator Corderman: it wouldn't because you're going to hear the same story

Mayor Martinez: And that's what's it's not productive on social media Senator.

Senator Corderman: So moving forward having your support from for both your folks that they would be very is there any opportunity to talk about NTF before we talked about how the Street Crimes Unit and NTF were kind of in a bind. Is there any opportunity between the multi agencies to have some sort of MOU in place or something as far as a Street Crimes Unit again, that's not taking away from NTF but is still doing what your Street Crimes Unit did in the past, because I mean, I think again I would refer to you but try to be proactive when some of these, you can't, you don't have a crystal ball, I get that, you don't know when some of these incidences happened probably recently that they're probably issues that you know that you said before you can have as many police in the world but you are not going to stop them.

Chief Kifer: You are not going to stop any of those recent issues.

Senator Corderman: I would counter that let's show would there have been opportunity that whatever that is --. That is what could have been met previously in some other way I don't know.

Chief Kifer: Yeah ---, but I am going to counter you and say that we do that already so you can't, you can't, you can say because talking about people doing that we do something else before this happened, but we're already going to other people. So the amount of crime we do prevent isn't being taken into

account because how do you measure that? How do you measure how much crime to prevent because you love that --.

Senator Corderman: That's very complicated I will give you that.

Chief Kifer: I'll give you an example. We've got a guy the night before last here in an apartment complex here in Hagerstown that have stolen gun from a burglary of a gun shop in Berkeley County. So we had that gun off the street and we made an arrest that night did that gun hurt anyone? No, but as that prevented something or could have prevented something, right? So the fact that we didn't get the other two weeks' worth of incidence isn't a measure of that we didn't work enough there's always a part of the population that's going to commit crime. Always and that's why that number we talked about earlier being low. We're at that low level of crime range that we've been at for a long time. The nation has been a low-level crime range. You guys probably have got to be equally as low as not from the 1980s and 1990s where crime rate is quite high. So the fact that we're maintained at low levels of physical part of the population exists, right?

Senator Corderman: You can understand the challenges that happens with understanding the staffing strengths and issues. Is there an opportunity or appetite to have a multi-agency Street Crimes Unit with an MOU similar to your NTF to help your department and that's my question.

Sheriff Albert: Senator. I, this just me talking it would take away from something else that we're doing.

Chief Kifer: That's what we are doing, we're taking away from NTF try to do street crimes where we're already taking away.

Individual: You're not taking away from NTF.

Sheriff Albert: I will give you an example one of the cases they work recent with it was probably maybe a year ago that we were up on a wire with the DA and they were working out of a Baltimore, Baltimore was a huge, we know it was a huge drug corridor coming out here. I mean, we were coordinating we've stopped vehicles on their way to Hagerstown and were taking fentanyl, cocaine. you name it we were taking it the guns we were getting this before they ever got here. We didn't publicize that a lot. Maybe we should have, this group I feel comfortable telling you, I think we stopped off a lot of things from happening in Washington County and Hagerstown because of that but if we, if we focus toward something else I'm afraid we'll take away from the some of those long-term and, and investigations that we need to be doing to stop that type of things from getting to our communities.

Chief Kifer: In the blending of what we did with NTF and also doing the street crime stuff, the street crime guys went out there and became the agents is that we can happen so that we have something we have actionable intelligence in the city that says this is going on as directed toward violence, and I made it very clear when I did this with Brian -- when we updated the MOU with NTF violence had to take a precedence over drugs, but drugs are always going to be placed under violence for the most part and I'm not saying all the time, but for the most part. So when we have actual intelligence on violence then those guys come in and they work that until its concluded. Then they go back into the drug work and are still available to help with anything in the county with a big case we can still roll in and do that. It speeds overtime for those guys. So we found ways to navigate that shortfall but by making us more efficient in areas with people that we have.

Senator Corderman: So basically, the short answer is no, it's not going to happen.

Sheriff Albert: We'd love to do it. I just don't have anybody to do it with

Chief Kifer: There's no staff.

Sheriff Albert: We would have to take somebody from something else.

Chief Kifer: I've got thirty officers in patrol and I got NTF agents. I got CID, and I got a SRO's that I'd have to pull from to put together my team and partner with him then so somebody's got

Senator Corderman: But that would be the thing, one or two from you, one or two from you and one or two from you, you get the idea, alright one thing real quick then I want to kind of get Dave Sovine involved in this to talk about public safety with the schools coming back, here. Sheriff you just said about publicizing and stuff like that. And that's always a balance act as far as you know, what the public is aware of the transparency and all of that. I'm fairly sure I know this answer but does the city and/or the county or both do you have a dashboard that shows statistics things of that nature to the public can access readily. I've seen different agencies across the top of your local but there's a place that you can go online and see this is the amount of you know robberies/homicide's whatever it may be basically what, I know you have one Sheriff, different people in this room, from time to time where a private citizen can go online and see whether its in the county the city or even the state I don't know if the state has one or not just a dashboard where they can see crime statistics? Does that exist?

Chief Kifer: We don't have one on our site or anything that's something we could look to do but we don't have it that's readily easily available.

Sheriff Albert: I think the city does the same we put it out monthly via social media said we've had this many calls for service. I think the last on is eighteen hundred we break down past we had three hundred arrests and number of traffic citations, but we don't break it down into unit the different crimes that we have.

Senator Corderman: You will see a lot like the Health Department does that over different dashboards for different things you know whether its opioids or back during covid or whatever you can see what's happened in any locality and any city -- know as far as that information is accessible or not.

Sheriff Albert: We could look at something like that to be able to do.

Senator Corderman: So good work on that, I know people's time is precious here. At the last commissioner's meeting I know that there were some a bunch of parents that we're concerned particularly with some of this public safety issues within our city limits where they are walking to schools and with school coming back in session. Kind of piggyback from top of this, you know the staffing issue we just talked about which doesn't sound like there's going to be on, you know a whole lot of manpower per se. I can understand that in understanding that we appreciate the opportunities that will be presented here from the county and state to have some people drive through, but it is maybe piggyback on that all this talking to some of the timing around that around the school hour so Dave I will let you speak here for a few minutes. If you don't mind some of the challenges that particular that we're seeing with the Salem Avenue school and I would imagine probably Bestor to are probably the two most city walkable schools, but often, what you, what the concern is what the need is really.

Dr. David Sovine, Superintendent, Washington County Public Schools (WCPS): We rely on strong partnerships and I know as we prepare to go back to school both from the district level as well as the school level one of the back-to-school nights. It's awareness in terms of our critical partnership with parents having a presence in the walk zones particular drawing attention to bus stops. And as buses, the crossing arms are, are out there, making sure, as drivers are driving during school opening times as well as closing times there's a stronger awareness there. I just want to add that we benefit from a really strong partnership with the Hagerstown Police Department with the Chief. Certainly, the Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Albert, close open lines of communications with our supervisor of safety Steve Ganley if there are issues that occur at night or early in the mornings, there's a level of communication so that we can reallocate or adjust our SROs to be in targeted areas. But the reality is kind of working at the school level with our PTO's critical partnerships with our parents where possible parents buddy up and walking with their children or groups of children is certainly something we, we invite perhaps long-term some of the things that that I'm, that I'm used to and would recommend is partnerships with some cases of faith-based community, volunteers with nonprofits, that may want to partner with, with schools. Whether it's Bestor or Salem to increase the presence in those walk zones along with parents. I think those are all concepts that are very healthy and, and helpful, but for us just the partnership and the open line of communication with law enforcement is really, really helpful if we've had a significant challenge the night before or so forth making sure that we have a good level of the presence both from law enforcement as well as our safety teams being out in those targeted zones.

Senator Corderman: All right, so it sounds like you have a potential kind of an action plan already in place to reach out to some of the faith-based community in the nonprofit Community to help with that kind of back to school plan. I guess the short answer is there anything these individuals of schools were back in session with those particular schools in the city, Salem and Bestor which we have parents showing up in public forums concerned about Public Safety use. Is there anything that the school system is looking towards, I know you have a great partnership, but is it something to as simple as maybe one of these guys are doing some of their rides to the city. They're riding around these times around the school's. I don't know. I'm just kind of spit balling it. But it is there anything particular outside of the nonprofits, faith-based community you mentioned from the agencies that are here.

Dr. Sovine: I think from a parent's standpoint parents working with the school level administration and teams. I know from my experience as a school level administrator parents want to be a part of the solution and many cases, especially the opening of the school we invite those parents to work with school PTO's to be a presence and where possible walking with the students and, and certainly if we have any targeted challenges the night before or the morning of we will work with law enforcement. And also make sure we reallocate our resource officers and also Center Office Safety and Security team members to those zones.

Senator Corderman: Sheriff you were going to say something or Chief Kiser?

Sheriff Albert: Well, I just, I just wanted to mention we always do it. This will only be my second school, school year being in office, but the sheriff's office has historically the first week of school our patrol guys that's where they're at in the beginning and in the evenings, they're making those patrol checks through there and I'm sure the city does the same thing.

Chief Kifer: Day one every year as long as I remember all of my staff is working at daylight the first day of school. We're at every school we are there for visibility for vehicle traffic and pedestrian traffic to make sure everyone's getting there safe and feel good. Then yeah, the first week of school

Senator Corderman: Not just patrol?

Chief Kifer: Not just patrol we have detectives and staff seen we're all we are all out that very first, first day of school were all out with extra patrols.

Dr. Sovine: Senator just for clarity when I referenced an opportunity from my experiences, I know many nonprofit organizations and the faith-based community want to be a part of the solution and they have volunteers now, obviously, they would need to go through our volunteer approval process. But we if we have any organizations that want to adopt a school whether it's Bestor or Salem to help out in the mornings during arrival time in those walk zones or in the afternoons at dismissal, we welcome that level support and I would imagine our PTO's and school administrators would support that as well.

Senator Corderman: That's great and I appreciate what you guys do the first week. I guess long term what potentially I am not asking you to look back but looking forward you know, what happens after week one and week 2, first day is great week one is great, but you know what happens in October and November when the parents start coming back in the commissioner's meetings again and the school board meetings and so there's just something to be thinking about going forward and so all right. Well, I appreciate that. I think the last thing I wanted to kind of touch base on here today was with harm reduction and we've talked about this in the past. I know you guys had a meeting with counsel here just about a month ago. And first off Mayor, I'd like to commend you on that meeting. I watched that meeting really voicing some of the concerns I think of the entire community. It's a challenging situation. We all know that and let me do this all but I have no intent here, here to talk about getting rid of harm reduction. That's not what I'm here to talk about not here to talk about ending the program but the reality is two sets of opioids, like what do we do when folks wake up and there's these needles on the streets it provides I think you said of a very visceral reaction you know what I mean and how do we how do we combat that per se? You know, I, it was, it was interesting right after that letter went out, that's right around the time you guys had that meeting, I got an email from a behavior specialist from Johns Hopkins Bayview who may have worked with you guys before, talk about the needle exchange program and suggested as far as is it actually exchange. I don't think it is right now. It's just a give out but I guess maybe I'll kick it over you guys here for a second. I guess it's kind of give the quick overview of maybe, you know ask you if you had some numbers how many how many needles are going out and how many are coming in after everything? How many have you collected, how many calls are you getting that kind of stuff?

Earl Stoner: So, so needles going out in 2023 were twenty-one thousand five hundred and seventy. And the ones that we collected basically individuals bringing them back last year were eleven thousand three hundred and eighty-eight. And this year 2024 so far we've given out sixteen thousand nine hundred sixty and we've actually taken back nineteen thousand eight hundred and twenty nine. So into you know, the there's been a lot of research with the basically the one for one needle exchange as opposed to the way that we do it. It's my understanding first and foremost that requirement of the state is even if we wanted to we could not do a one on one needle exchange that the state doesn't basically we can't do that.

Senator Corderman: So all of the other 24 localities there's no one for one model out there?

Earl Stoner: No, not in Maryland now and so yeah anyway. Our long-term strategy, obviously first and foremost is to have less people using, the less people that you have using, especially individuals who inject drugs coming the less chance you have for needles to be around. From a short-term perspective it's pretty much kind of like what we're talking about today is that we have always educated the clients

when they come in, but this go around we're being a little bit more stern with our education. First and foremost spending a lot more time with individuals again, not necessarily in a threatening manner but the viability of the program rest on your shoulders, you know, we need you to bring these back. We need you to dispose of them appropriately. Secondly. We are also looking at the potential putting some of the kiosk or disposal boxes out right now. I don't know if it's public but Goodwill has agreed to have one on their property in the downtown area as basically a trial pilot. I know Frederick does it it's very successful in Frederick a lot of other larger cities around rural communities around the country are also utilizing that strategy but the biggest one that we've embarked on and I don't want to steal any of Peters thunder or the Mayor's thunder but since our meeting we've had several meetings and several discussions about partnership with the city simplistically speaking establishing a hotline. We already go out. We already somebody calls and says there are needles behind 125 East Avenue we will go out and pick those up. We've always done that. We don't get a lot. Yeah, we don't get a lot of calls.

Vicki Sterling: The nice thing is when you guys give us this advertisement we get more calls. So that already increases our services.

Senator Corderman: We're never going to rid of this I mean the reality is you're going to see it, trying to minimize that impact in the greater--- before someone has to call and I don't know what that is as far as is there any type of collaborative work to be done between the health department and the city and whoever we are physically picking them up on a daily basis, proactively like this area is a hot area, ___ street, we are out here every day.

Vicki Sterling: We are, I don't know if you've noticed but like now just so everybody knows because again perception sure we are out every single day. I have someone out on the street and I have now posted the schedule. So on Mondays Tuesdays Wednesdays and Fridays from 8:00 to 4:00 my whole overdose team is out. So they're always looking we've increased so myself and four other peers have gone out from 6:00 to 10:00 at night for the last Friday nights and we'll continue to do that to just do the cleanup and have the conversations and gave out more materials. So we are averaging more than forty hours a week in the community. I think given time if you all came here today we had a peer here today when Kyle was here when I got here.

Senator Corderman: How long have you been doing that Vicki? That kind of enhanced...

Vicki Sterling: Oh my gosh. I mean like the Friday nights were added since this but other than that we've been doing it.

Senator Corderman: Well, that's all gone because it sounds like your stats but this year it sounds like your kind of flipped it a little bit where you're picking it up and bringing a bit more in than previous years.

Earl Stoner: Back to the partnership with the city it is again I don't want to get too deep into it. But the bottom line is we are more visible on the hotline call this number. In hindsight we could have been educating a little bit more the community. The number could have been a little bit more visible lesson learned, hot line number more visible, educating the community more visible. Call comes in, correct me if I am wrong, but in essence a call comes in to the hotline and then the bridge of Life. Yes, the bridge of change which is origins under the city those individuals which we obviously will train and work with they will go out within I don't know if we have established a time frame, we're still working those out. But we will they we'll go out and pick those up for safe disposal. Okay. And again, if you

look at the research, I know that you know, we as a community aren't ready for this yet, but I would advocate for it in the long run. I would advocate for disposal boxes and be throughout the county.

Vicki Sterling: And another thing and just only because we document it and some of the calls I've gone on we were talking about lighting and while downtown is lit up, it's the alleys and like where we're collecting them it's not like it's on open streets. Like it's you know, it's bound in the corner back behind the tree so it's a bit like places that are secluded. So like Tri-State Electric Plumbing on right off Antietam that weird little thing the lady work back there, but there's no light at night and I said, why don't you get a motion detector and she said the people beside her have one and they're not having problems anymore. So think just little things like that.

Earl Stoner: And then the other thing is in addition to the patrols are really like integrated into the increased patrols on the street. It is really hitting a I guess a couple hot spots. One mainly behind, which of course is, Dual Highway Good Will and the computer store that seems to there seemed to be a concentration back there. So once a week hitting those known areas a little bit more aggressive than we had.

Vicki Sterling: And we have a good relationship with the vape shop and we've even set up tables there. Not around this but more around youth vaping but also just having that relationship and we have we do Save a Life Narcan day will be there.

Mayor Martinez: Can I say, that's another thing I have been hearing in the community that I've been very you know vocal about is that the programs can be here but not seeing folks like they used to a couple of years ago where you would see someone down and Jonathan Street area or down by the Locust Street area that was kind of doing the outreach and that was where community was kind of come in and calling is you know, we're not seeing those things happen. And so if you if you're giving out breakfast on Prospect and you know, and everyone gets their check when the same day they get their breakfast, they walk straight down they meet the, the dealer and then they get they get high right there and community and they dispose of their trash, their clothes all of that. Those are the issues. It's not around violence. Those are the issues that I'm hearing community be fed up with and I mean when I say fed up with I mean there was a house in Park Place that is abandoned, code and police went in it was right beside some woman's that organizes the bus trips for the kids. She took trash out and seeing someone shooting up and having sex police and code went there. They patched it up. They cleaned it up. I mean it was horrific is probably a about this thick of just stuff in this backyard. They cleaned it up and within thirty minutes after everyone left. The door was kicked back in and they were back in the house. The next morning I went out there and called police because then community didn't want police to show up the next morning and then the dealers be targeting their cars. So these are the things that I'm hearing in community and I appreciate that your presence and that you guys have been really, community's been able to see because I've been hearing the feedback back from that. So thank you.

Earl Stoner: One other thing just as a point of clarity is the harm reduction program in and of itself is an infectious disease program. Secondary to that is you know behavioral and getting people into treatment and those sorts of things but I think that in the community there's a misperception that why aren't they getting people into treatment and what's it really is to prevent an HIV outbreak right mean that was really what it's for.

Senator Corderman: Right, that's one of the things you have talked about in the past. ---getting people into treatment or whatever do you keep statistics on as far as when somebody comes in to, you know, get a get, I don't know whatever they get that you have been able to engage with them or not engage

with them or get them on a program or not get them on a program with or like whatever it was the ten thousand you gave out. How many of those people are you actually getting into a program?

Earl Stoner: We made three hundred and seventy-one referrals this year and last year was two hundred and eleven.

Senator Corderman: And that's out of how many people have come in to get product or whatever you call it.

Earl Stoner: Total participants this year is five hundred and eighty-nine.

Senator Corderman: Okay, so you are getting over half of them.

Vicki Sterling: Now I can I say something that is only our reduction. Yeah, so somebody comes in for harm reduction. I don't know their name. They get a number and they can walk out into that lobby and say to the receptionist can I see something about going to treatment or come in the next day and say can I see somebody to go to treatment? This is only someone that is sitting in that harm reduction room or meeting with a harm reduction peer. We have ten other peers. We have crisis response for overdose so that's only harm reduction, but that doesn't mean that some of those participants that are on that

Senator Corderman: Once you are giving them the needles or whatever you're having a conversation at that point and time.

Vicki Sterling: Absolutely, oh yeah, they come in they ask what, you know we go through questions. Are you interested in treatment? Do you want to speak to a peer? Would you like care services? Those are three questions that we ask.

Senator Corderman: The last question I have then we are probably going to adjourn here after a quick wrap up. You talk to the very beginning about the one for one that you don't think that's anywhere in the state that has that.

Vicki Sterling: I am on the Advisory Board, and we mark that because I review applications. We don't accept applications for one for one. Because when they put in you have to be approved by the state. You cannot do a one-for-one exchange.

Senator Corderman: Right. So that's why I'm getting that right if there was to be a change in that is that something that you would support?

Vicki Sterling: No, it's not evidence based and there's and I can email you the study in Baltimore about that.

Senator Corderman: Well, I don't want to go down that rabbit hole. A person reached out to me who works for Johns Hopkins in Baltimore who's promoting a one for one, so, I'm just curious what your position was on that overall.

Vicki Sterling: It's not effective and it doesn't help when we're talking about spreading infectious diseases and people are going to change

Senator Corderman: That's what you're trying to say right now that's what the intent is.

Vicki Sterling: and then there is, it has more of a chance of reusing and sharing needles if you have to bring a one-for-one.

Senator Corderman: All right, so just to kind of round, you know circle back here real quick. So we talked about staffing issues in short-term, long-term, short-term. It sounds like we may get some assistance from the county and the state that have some additional drive-throughs a couple hours a day. So we appreciate whatever help they can provide there. Lieutenant Colonel you talked about moving resources around, any resources you can move around would be greatly appreciated particularly in the core. Long-term I get the bigger conversation obviously between the administration and the mayor and Council going forward as you're going to have your union negotiations coming up in the future. The school board talked about you know, there are challenges with the walking schools with the short term actually seems to be in pretty good position, but maybe long-term work with the faith-based community, some of the nonprofit's to develop a plan that's gonna be more than just the first day of the first week so we don't have a continuous issue. And then the last thing we talked about harm reduction you guys are not be honest with you do a lot more than I thought you were doing. Glad to hear those numbers as far as this year based on other years of having more people's are actually coming in off the street then in the past.

Vicki Sterling: Can we share another number with you.

Earl Stoner: What's that the 59%? As of today we have a 59% reduction. If you look at the first half of last year compared to the first half of this year, we're down 59% of fatality overdose.

Vicki Sterling: And that's huge. We've never seen a number like that.

Senator Corderman: Before we adjourn, I know the Mayor had a couple of things to say. Commissioner Barr I had you invited to represent the County Commissioners do you have anything you want to add at the moment.

President John Barr, Washington County, Board of County Commissioners: Yeah, so I would just like to say thank you for reaching out and having everyone in this this room today. I think, you know, we obviously have a wonderful community and I think it's all of us are here with one goal in mind to make it even a better community and so hats off that we can sit and have this dialogue and appreciate everyone's candidness and professionalism. Hopefully we can do more of this and less of maybe the social media the letter writing back and forth, but we just need to talk to encourage the citizens of not only Hagerstown but Washington County because we are a good community we do work together, but we can do it even better and I will just say that from my personal perspective many of you in this room know that I have to bring this up. I was president of MACo a few years ago and I traveled I spent a whole year and traveled all over the state, and I was appalled by the other communities the other 23 jurisdictions many of them would say we hate our school board superintendent. We don't even speak to him, and we're buddies. You know, we don't like our Sheriff we don't speak to him. We collaborate and work together almost daily and same way with the police chief.

Earl Stoner: What about the Health Department?

Commissioner Barr: So, well and yes, thank you Earl. So, we have a lot of good things going. We just need to continue this and strive really hard to make this community to the best.

Senator Corderman: I appreciate that Commissioner President. My intention here is to hopefully, I hope that we continue this conversation not just with the with this group here by then another opportunity to talk about with the faith-based community, or nonprofits, for those called multiple different conversations going forward as far as you know, some other groups and other concerns. So unless anybody else has anything to add, Michelle I know we heard from your earlier do you have anything else.

Michelle Gordon: No, thank you.

Senator Corderman: Again, I appreciate everyone for making the time today and I look forward to continue to work with you here.

