

Crime spike sparks fresh LMPD approach, not 'traffic stop after traffic stop,' chief says

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[Darcy Costello](#), **Louisville Courier Journal** Published 7:53 p.m. ET July 10, 2019 | Updated 11:31 p.m. ET July 10, 2019

Louisville Metro Police are refining tactics and taking a fresh approach to addressing a recent spike in violent crime, amid [communitywide scrutiny around traffic stops](#), LMPD Chief Steve Conrad said Wednesday.

Rather than "traffic stop after traffic stop," officers are getting out of patrol cars to talk with neighbors and conducting foot patrols in "micro-hot spots" that can be as small as a single block in a neighborhood, Conrad said.

"Over the past couple years, there was a real focus on community contacts, and in many neighborhoods, that turned into just traffic stop after traffic stop," Conrad said in a sit-down interview with the Courier Journal. "... We're absolutely still stopping cars, but we need to be out on the street talking to people."

It's an effort to interact more with the people who know most about what's happening in "challenging" neighborhoods: the residents themselves, Conrad said.

"They're going to know better than anyone," he said. "They live there."

The shift in strategy has been a reaction to recent car thefts and shootings, as well as the "very frustrating" spike in violent crime, including [multiple fatal shootings](#).

"We have not seen it like this in a long time," Conrad said Wednesday.

May saw a marked increase in violent crime, according to the uniform crime report prepared by the department, going from 2,428 violent crimes reported in April to 2,905 the following month.

The department has investigated 53 homicides so far this year. At this point last year, Louisville Metro Police had investigated 41.

The number of nonfatal criminal shootings has dropped from 147 at this point last year to 126 as of July 10, Conrad and spokeswoman Jessie Halladay said Wednesday.

Conrad said he still has faith in his "people, places and narcotics" strategy, arguing it has led to decreases in violent crime in recent years, but said there is room to improve.

"With refinement in our techniques and our tactics ... we can be effective," he said.

Asked whether he agreed with the FBI's assessment that the recent violence has been gang- or drug-related, Conrad said it's fair to say some of the crimes are gang-involved, but that it may be too soon to say it definitively.

"The recent violence, other than knowing we have some people that we know are gang-involved, until we've had an opportunity to make the arrests and talk to everybody, I don't know that we can say with certainty that that is accurate," he said.

The special agent in charge of Louisville's FBI field office, Robert Brown Jr., [told the Courier Journal this month](#) that much of what's happening between Louisville's "east" and "west" side gangs is rooted in the drug trade, turf wars or revenge.

Young teenagers are being recruited by older gang members — who don't want to be caught with guns or drugs — to do their "dirty" work, Brown said. That includes hiring teens as young as 13 to be shooters.

"That doesn't mean the victims are culpable or deserved what happened to them," Brown said. "A lot of these are innocent victims getting caught up in the crossfire."

Lt. Emily McKinley, who oversees LMPD's homicide unit, [said last month](#) that guns and vehicles used in "several" recent drive-by shooting homicides were stolen.

"Kids don't have a venue to vent their frustration and resolve issues with each other," she said. "That's what gotten us here."

On Wednesday, Conrad reiterated some of McKinley's pleas for Louisville residents to lock their cars, keep guns locked away and monitor their children's social media use.

Calling the recent rash of violence "frustrating," he pleaded with the community to recognize that officers are working "very, very hard" to address the spike in violent crime and are modifying their approach.

"It's not just a focus on enforcement. There's an equal focus on outreach," Conrad said. "We have them doing foot patrols, we have them knocking on doors, we have them trying to contact people in those neighborhoods to let them know why we're there and what they can do to help us."

It's going to take the entire community working together to curb the violence, he said.

"Unless people are willing to get involved, we are not going to be able to change what is happening," Conrad said.

"Please tell the police what you know. Please be vigilant in your neighborhood," he said. "... What we need is everyone's help."