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Latest Poll Shows Crime is Primary Concern, Strong Support For Law Enforcement and for Hiring More Police Officers *But Police Job Rating Slips*

(Memphis, TN – January 31, 2024) The latest countywide poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies for the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission shows that voters continue to express a high degree of respect for police officers (93%). Voters would like a stronger police presence in their neighborhoods (75%), and overwhelmingly endorse hiring more police officers (84%).

However, the job rating for local police officers has declined significantly since the last Crime Commission poll in 2021. Countywide, 51% of respondents gave local police an excellent or good rating while 47% gave them a fair/poor rating. In Memphis, just 41% of respondents gave police an excellent/good rating while 69% of the rest of the county give local police an excellent/good rating.

The poll, conducted January 9–11, 2024, included 400 registered voters, with 253 from Memphis. The racial breakdown was 60% African-American, 31% white, and 8% other in the city of Memphis. Countywide, the racial breakdown was 47% white, 47% African-American, and 6% other. The gender breakdown was about the same (58% female and 42% male countywide, and 60% female and 40% male for Memphis). Age ranges included 44% between 18–44, 32% between 45–64 and 24% 65 plus.

Among all demographic groups in Memphis and Shelby County, crime ranks as the highest priority (57%). When asked what specific crime issue was the most important to focus on, gun violence ranked first (38%), and juvenile crime ranked second (22%).

Perception of the criminal justice system as too lenient was high among every subgroup. For the adult criminal justice system, 64% of white respondents and 50% of African-American respondents felt the system was too lenient. For juveniles, 64% of African-Americans and 62% of white respondents felt the system was too lenient.

In a near consensus across all subgroups, an overwhelming 87% of respondents support changing state law to require that serious juvenile offenders receive supervision, treatment, and rehabilitation beyond the current 19th birthday limit.

Only 30% of respondents believe crime victims receive a lot of (4%) or some (26%) support and assistance from the criminal justice system while 65% feel victims receive a little (25%) or not much support at all (40%).

Every public safety proposal tested produced a near consensus level of support among both Memphis and countywide voters. Five of the six proposals received an 87% or higher level of support. These included: focusing more resources and efforts on holding serious violent offenders accountable (97%); providing more resources to offenders who have been incarcerated when they return to the community (96%); and focusing more resources and efforts on holding those who steal vehicles or break into them accountable (95%).

"Through the Safe Community Action Plan, legislative proposals, and other means, the Crime Commission is working to advocate steps that can prevent and reduce crime," said Bill Gibbons, Crime Commission president. "This poll shows that respondents still support our police officers and want an increase in the number of officers. At the same time, their job performance has slipped since our last survey. I think most people realize law enforcement could do a better job with more resources and smart use of those resources. It's also clear that respondents want reforms to the criminal justice system to make those who commit crimes more accountable."

"The Crime Commission's survey gives us a barometer of what Memphians and Shelby Countians are thinking regarding crime and the criminal justice system," said Deidre Malone, president/CEO, The Carter Malone Group, LLC, who served as a consultant on the polling project. "The outlook on crime varies some based on race and geography, but the trend lines are similar across the subgroups surveyed."

Bill Gibbons and Deidre Malone are both available for follow up interviews by members of the media.

The entire 40-page report on the survey is on the Crime Commission website at <https://memphiscrime.org/public-safety-poll-results/>

Public Opinion Strategies is a national research firm headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. Founded in 1991, it has conducted more than 11 million interviews with voters and consumers in all 50 states and more than two dozen foreign countries. It has a track record of accurate polling in the Memphis and Shelby County community and has conducted two previous polls for the Crime Commission.

The Carter Malone Group is a public relations firm headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee. The firm was founded in 2003 and worked with Public Opinion Strategies and the Crime Commission on the poll development and reporting.

About the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission

The Memphis Shelby Crime Commission is an independent, non-profit 501© (3) agency that organizes the work of the Safe Community Action Plan and its partners. It is funded through the generous contributions of many private sector donors. Ben Adams, chairman emeritus of Baker Donelson Law Firm, serves as board chairman. Bill Gibbons serves as Commission president.

About the Safe Community Action Plan

Launched in 2007, development of the Safe Community Action Plan is spearheaded by the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission. It is a community-based crime prevention and reduction initiative. The current plan is for the five-year period 2022-2026. Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner chairs the Safe Community Action Plan implementation.

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