



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

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**Testimony of Attorney General Dave Sunday to the
House and Senate GOP Policy Committees**

August 10, 2026, Hazleton, PA

Good morning, Chairman Argall, Chairman Rowe and members of the committees. Thank you, Representative Watro, for hosting this hearing today.

I'm going to spend my time today on the macro level of what is occurring in the state and in the nation regarding crime. There is a lot of good news in the data and some warning signs as well that we need to be vigilant about.

CRIME STATS

I'm the eternal optimist, so I'll start with the good news. Violent crime in major cities and generally across the board is down and in many cases is at or below 2019 levels, getting us back to the levels seen before the pandemic-era surge of violent crime. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency reports declining crime rates in their most recent report which relies on preliminary data for 2025.¹

I serve on the national Council on Criminal Justice. In their midyear update², they report that nine of the 13 offenses that they track are lower in the first half of this year than the first half of last year. Homicides are near historic lows – this has not been seen since the beginning of the 1900s.

Concerningly though, one of the segments with an uptick in activity is drug offenses. This is certainly borne out by the work we do in our Bureau of Narcotics. Just last year, we removed over 56.5 million doses of fentanyl off the streets of Pennsylvania. That amount of fentanyl is staggering – it's enough to kill four times the population of Pennsylvania. This year, we are seeing growing numbers of cocaine in our work in Pennsylvania.

¹ [gvip violent crime and clearance rate trends analysis 2026.pdf](#)

² [Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Mid-Year 2026 Update - Council on Criminal Justice](#)



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Criminal organizations are not stagnant though. When law enforcement surges resources into an area, they move operations. Recently, my office has announced drug charges in Johnstown in Western Pennsylvania against 65 individuals which included individuals from as far away as Philadelphia.³ More locally, a few weeks ago, we shut down a cocaine organization that allegedly brought cocaine in from North Carolina to the Wilkes-Barre area.⁴

One necessary improvement to law that has been proposed by Rep. Watro⁵ would bring the statute of limitations for drug delivery resulting in death crimes in line with other drug offenses.

Another area of concern has to do with Organized Retail Theft. Two years ago, with Senator Argall's leadership, the Legislature provided my office with funding to create an organized retail theft unit. Since then, it has delivered major results and been recognized nationally as a model. We have partnered with national and local retailers to ensure that we are aware of organized theft rings and address them. In our first full year, we topped over 100 investigations in 52 counties – this showcases that organized retail theft isn't just a big city issue.

The last area I'll touch on in is human trafficking. This is a hard category to do a statistical analysis on because of how hard it can be for victims to report and how the views of what is and isn't human trafficking have changed. We have actively partnered with legislators and law enforcement to educate our communities about what to watch out for and what to do. Since the formation of our Human Trafficking Section two years ago, we have seen a 125% increase in our active cases since the formation of the section.

³ [Attorney General Sunday, Law Enforcement Partners Announce Charges Against 65 Drug Dealers in Blair, Cambria Counties - PA Office of Attorney General](#)

⁴ [AG Sunday's Narcotics Agents Shut Down North Carolina-to-Wilkes-Barre Cocaine Pipeline with Arrest of Trafficker - PA Office of Attorney General](#)

⁵ [Watro: Statute of Limitations on Drug Deliveries that Result in Death Needs to Change | PA State Rep. Dane Watro](#)



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The funding that you supported in our budget helps unlock grant and other funding to help with this work. Our office is investigating 79 cases in 34 counties with another 46 investigations across the Commonwealth.

Lastly, thank you to the Legislature for SB45 and HB 1286 which will give our office more tools to fight this scourge and educate hospitality workers on the warning signs of human trafficking.

There are a lot of things working right now, and it is leading to some of the numbers we are talking about. I am very cautious about relying solely on statistics because they don't always tell the full story and they can change. For example, overdoses are down, and that is obviously good, but that provides no comfort to the parents grieving their loss of a son or daughter. And, even as homicides may be down, there are communities where drug trafficking continues, and that continues to create a real sense of fear.

I caution anyone from declaring victory related to drops in crime. The criminal justice system is a lagging indicator of societal issues, and we have to keep looking ahead to anticipate the next challenge. Instead, now is the time to continue to aggressively pursue push, to assess what programs have had a positive impact, what programs did not yield the results we wanted and understand how to best marshal our resources.

It's also critical to ensure that law enforcement has the resources they need to do their jobs. Recently, I joined Congressman Rob Bresnahan here in Northeast Pennsylvania to announce critical funding for local law enforcement. I know that members of the Legislature advocate for grants for their local departments – that is so critical to our success. Ensuring they have the tools and support is critical to addressing the recruitment and retention crisis facing law enforcement. Recently, I led a Law Enforcement & Recruitment Task Force that contained a number of recommendations that I would encourage your review of.⁶

SENIOR SCAMS

⁶ [AG Sunday-Led Initiative Finds that Law Enforcement Recruitment Challenges Caused by Rising Stress of Jobs, Human Services Staff Shortages, Need for Equal Pay - PA Office of Attorney General](#)



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One area I believe that we can improve with a better law is with regards to protection of seniors. With the advancement of artificial intelligence, scammers have new tools to hyper target seniors and steal their assets. Our scam prevention team received 4,000 complaints in 2025, totaling 76 million in losses. But what's concerning is only 1 out of 44 of fraud cases are ever reported to law enforcement.

That's why I created an Elder Exploitation Section to address fraud perpetrated by those known to the victim. Some examples include a family member, power of attorney or caregiver. We have 47 open cases in 21 counties.⁷

The Legislature just took action with the passage of SB992, which is the first major update of the telemarketing law. This will provide clarity and tools to my office to combat one of the top ways people get targeted through robocalls and texting.⁸

The Legislature should also take action by addressing the Older Adult Protective Services Act or OAPSA. [Senate Bill 738](#) would help stop fraud before it happens by empowering financial institutions to put holds on transactions they believe could be fraudulent. That pause is critical to allow a potential victim to realize they are being defrauded of their money because once it's gone it is gone.

AI and the growth of technology present new challenges that we must be prepared to respond to. AI is a particular concern for seniors, children and vulnerable residents which is why I created a Technology and Privacy Protection Unit within the Bureau of Consumer Protection to focus on this critical issue. Over the next few weeks, I will be announcing new actions to protect children from big tech.

FELONY MURDER

I would be remiss, if during this hearing, I didn't bring up the ongoing discussions around sentencing for felony murder. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled mandatory life

⁷ [AG Sunday Launches Elder Exploitation Section to Expand Protections for Older Pennsylvanians; Focus will be on Financial Theft and Fraud - PA Office of Attorney General](#)

⁸ [Attorney General Sunday Discusses Public Safety Impacts Expected from Pa. Legislature's Budget Deal and Bills Passed During Budget Sessions - PA Office of Attorney General](#)



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sentences unconstitutional and provided the Legislature 120 days to address their ruling. That deadline passed without a solution being agreed to.

Recently, my words explaining my position on this issue have been used to attack members who absolutely did the right thing and stood with victims. That is wrong, and I don't appreciate political games being played with such an important issue.

So, let me be clear now – SB1400 would provide an appropriate sentencing structure for felony murder.

As a reminder, felony murder is a serious crime. Some crimes include homicides which involve violent and brutal rapes, robberies and home invasion burglaries where someone kills another person with a deadly weapon or their own hands or even burns someone to death in their own home. This is not conjecture or rhetoric. It is reality.

I worked these cases myself as a prosecutor. A large majority of felony murder cases generally involve primary actors who played significant roles in the commission of violent and tragic crime. The so-called "lookouts" or "getaway" drivers are few and far between. The actual deadly shooter; the fatal arsonist; the deadly rapist; the robber who killed another person: these are majority of individuals convicted of this crime.

Therefore, given the violent and tragic nature of these most serious offenses, a significant mandatory minimum sentence is appropriate and necessary. The legislation passed by the House fails to provide any such sentence and in doing so provides a huge break to convicted murderers.

Instead of addressing this critical issue, House Democrats inserted an unrelated bill to the second bill the Senate sent. The bill, HB1042, would provide medical release options for all inmates regardless of the crime they committed using very broad definitions for terminal and serious illness. It creates a very broad and permissive standard for release. I detailed my concerns with this in a letter to the House the day they amended the bill which you can



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[see here](#)⁹. This could include inmates convicted of first-degree murder, which is premeditated murder, serial child predators and other serious offenses.

I thank each member of the Senate who voted TWICE in a bipartisan manner to address this critical issue. The House Republican Caucus tried to bring this to a vote but the vote was tied, with just one Democrat joining Republicans. Victims deserve better than legislative gamesmanship.

In the leadup to that vote, I saw some House members who came to press conferences and said they stood with victims – to then go to Harrisburg, and vote with convicts. That’s unacceptable.

We should not allow this conversation to stop with the passing of the Court’s deadline. We need to continue to work on this issue and get something done in the fall on felony murder to avoid the chaos, uncertainty for victims and inequities in the system. A crime as serious as felony murder cannot be the only crime without proper statutory guidelines for sentencing.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

I have long said that my philosophy on criminal justice is rooted in accountability and redemption. It has to be both though. If we don’t hold people accountable, our system falls apart, and the criminal element is emboldened and our communities become less safe.

At the same time, I have been an advocate for evidence-based programs that provide opportunities for redemption. Ninety-five percent of everyone who goes to prison will return to our communities. What we do with them while they are in our custody will help determine their future. I have long advocated for laws like clean slate, co-responders, treatment courts and programs like our Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative (LETI), vocational training, mental health treatment and re-entry programs for inmates. These have been bipartisan initiatives that have brought people from all perspectives together because we are focused on outcomes and community safety.

⁹ [Letter to the House of Representatives on HB1042 PN 3793](#)



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Prosecutors and law enforcement have come a long way on these issues, myself included, and I think some of the improved numbers I mentioned earlier are the direct result of these initiatives and the hard work of law enforcement and prosecutorial offices. In every initiative, there must be balance. I fear that the lasting impact of the divisive fight over felony murder is the loss of trust between well-intentioned individuals who advocate for the incarcerated, those who encounter the criminal justice system, and those in law enforcement and prosecutorial offices.

I urge policy makers to not succumb to the temptation to politicize criminal justice issues but instead focus on finding solutions that protect our communities and give people the tools they need to take control of their lives.

CONCLUSION

In my 20 years as a prosecutor, I have found that good things happen when people come together and bring their different perspectives to the table. I've seen that with our response to the opioid crisis, the post-pandemic surge in crime and in countless other instances. I look forward to working with each of you to ensure our communities are safe because as I always say, if our communities aren't safe, nothing else matters.

Thank you for having me today.