

## Narrative

We have a crime epidemic in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Being listed as the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> worst crime area in the entire country for the previous two years surely mandates that it is time to stop dismissing or ignoring crime statistics and to begin seriously addressing the problem. Such action is realistically past due because Hot Springs totally ignored being listed in the top 10 worst metropolitan crime areas. Because other cities are actively working to address crime, our crime rate could soon pass Memphis, New Orleans, and Detroit. Unfortunately, instead of investigating why we received such horrible ratings, the only apparent action taken by our city leaders was a single sentence statement in the 2006 State of the City Report (Section 7). In this report, our city manager stated, "It (2006) included the release of an unexpected and unfounded crime rate report by a Kansas City company." Such cavalier dismissals of serious public safety situations are no longer acceptable. Our report shows that every crime reporting agency and organization dealing with statistical crime data found, concurs that we do indeed, have a major crime problem in Hot Springs and in Arkansas. Although Hot Springs is currently the worst, Arkansas has more cities in the "Most Dangerous Cities" category than any other state.

This report also purposely includes information which is several years old to demonstrate that our community and state have had a major crime problem for several years. These findings were especially surprising in view of the fact that we have seen little concern or indication of city leaders addressing our crime problems or even admitting that they exist. Assuming that the Hot Springs city manager could possibly be correct in his quick dismissal of the single report, the Garland Good Government Group - Committee on Public Safety was charged with the task of researching and reporting on just how safe or how dangerous the Hot Springs area really is. This document is the result of our efforts and accurately reflects our findings.

To begin our examination, we first reviewed the Morgan Quitno report, Safest and Most Dangerous 25 Metropolitan Areas in the U.S. which listed Hot Springs as one of the most dangerous areas in the country. We discovered that these annual reports are based on actual crime data reports provided primarily by the U.S. Department of Justice - Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The crime reporting categories are limited to murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. Morgan Quitno Press has been compiling this data and providing such monthly and annual reports for many years. We find these periodic reports to be credible and viable indicators of crime problems. Note that Morgan Quitno has recently been acquired by CQ Press of Washington, D.C. which will continue providing periodic reports of statistical crime data.

To be certain that our report was comprehensive, we researched data from numerous sources. We discovered numerous organizations which all revealed the same horrific crime scenario for Hot Springs. There are likely even more sources but due to the consistency of information obtained, we consider those sources listed in the "Findings" section of this report to be creditable and ample for demonstrating that the Hot Springs deserves to be ranked in the "Most Dangerous" areas in the United States. Like those of us on the committee, we feel that most citizens have a feeling of security while living in their respective communities. After researching and compiling the attached information, we can now state with authority that Hot Springs and Arkansas' shocking crime statistics prove our communities are not safe. For example, while Morgan Quitno reports ranked our area as the 9<sup>th</sup> and

13<sup>th</sup> most dangerous in the entire county, our own state statistics indicate that Hot Springs is currently the most dangerous city in Arkansas. Other crime reporting agencies and organizations include:

1. AreaConnect, a data clearinghouse for demographics and various local city information including crime ratings shows that Hot Springs ranks well below the national average crime rate in every single crime category.
2. The Disaster Center, an information center specializing in disaster information worldwide shows that Hot Springs crime is worse than the state of Arkansas in every crime category. This disaster related organization also notes, "Crime in the United States accounts for more deaths, injuries, and loss of property than all natural disasters combined."
3. Records obtained directly from the Hot Springs Police Department prove that while some offenses are somewhat lower, homicides and various other dangerous crimes have increased significantly. The first half year crime reports for 2007 show that our murder rate has tripled when compared to the same 2006 period.
4. Hot Springs ranks as number one (1) or worst in the Arkansas Crime Index provided by Melissa Data which obtains their statistical information from Uniform Crime Statistics. Melissa Data is a California-based company which sells hardware and software but specializes in information databases and statistics.
5. Hot Springs receives worse rankings in the "Current Local Area Crime Rankings" provided by Sperling's Best Places than any Arkansas city except for Little Rock. Sperling is a highly regarded company which provides information on the best places in the U.S. to live. On a "lower is better," 1 to 10 scale, Hot Springs ranks a "7" for violent crime and a "7" for property crime. The national average for each category is "3." Sperling ranks Arkansas as the 15<sup>th</sup> worst crime state in the country.
6. Hot Springs lags only Little Rock in the "All Property Crime" ranking by City Rating. City Rating provides city guides, school ratings, cost of living, occupational outlooks, weather history, relocation and financial assistance information, and, of course, crime statistics. This report also notes that Hot Springs is higher than the national average for all crimes.
7. Hot Springs is rated very poorly by "Great Schools," an organization which rates public, private, and magnet schools. Their "Violent Crime Index" on a lower is better, 1 to 10 index, rates Hot Springs at "7" while both the state of Arkansas and the U.S. are rated at "3".
8. Hot Springs has a consolidated ranking of number one worst crime city when a comparison of U.S. Department of Justice - FBI crime report is made for the eleven Arkansas cities with populations more than 30,000. The combined scores for all crimes resulted in Hot Springs having a total "crimes average per 1000" people of 26.76. North Little Rock was second worst with 21.47 while Little Rock had 21.18. The average score for all cities was 16.04. In other words, Hot Springs has the highest incidence of crimes of any Arkansas city.

All of the above referenced crime statistics and data are included in the following “Findings” section with expanded explanations and all of the above statistical and data reports are included following that section. Note that reports are listed with source locations so that the readers of this report can verify the authenticity of each source and obtain more information from each of the organizations if needed.

It was noted in the Morgan Gitno report, Safest and Most Dangerous 25 Metropolitan Areas in the U.S. that Shreveport / Bossier City Louisiana which was listed as 10<sup>th</sup> last year has taken steps to correct their crime problem. We contacted the Shreveport Police Department and spoke to several people about what programs or plans they initiated to improve their crime rating. Typical responses were: Initiation of community oriented programs, More officers, Greater visibility of officers, More field investigators, Better familiarity with beats. Almost without exception, the responses from Shreveport involved adding officers.

Note in the report data that the national average ratio of law enforcement personnel per thousand inhabitants is 3.5. If the Hot Springs population is considered at present to be 37,500 with 98 current officers, the ratio for Hot Springs is 2.6. While this number may be considered as average for our area, we feel that there are numerous factors unique to Hot Springs which make the ratio number inadequate. Factors which impact our police to population ratio include tourism, racing season, gambling, hurricane victim relocations, conventions, bike rallies, bass tournaments, out-of-town shoppers, city limits not including dense suburbs, etc.

If, for example, Hot Springs has three million tourists per year, who each stay in town three days, the average population would swell from 37,500 to 62,158. Recently, visitor totals of 5 million per year have been reported by the A&P Commission. If this amount is used, the population would be 78,596. Of course, this number fluctuates. During the HOG Rally, which occurs during tourist season, Hot Springs may experience 100,000 people in town. Hot Springs Police Department personnel have stated that it is “like policing a town of 80,000 during the summer.” Policing a town of 80,000 would bring the ratio of police per 1,000 down to the unacceptably low number of 1.2 or considerably less than half what would be minimally acceptable.

Shreveport law enforcement personnel informed us that their primary crime problems still relate to drugs. Our police chief has stated at various functions that some 85 percent of all Hot Springs crimes are drug related. Shreveport reports their drug problem to be mostly crack and marijuana and they are beginning to see some “cheese,”

Hot Springs’ problem drugs are crack and meth and we are beginning to have a “prescription” drug problem. While these minor differences exist, the solutions seem to be similar. Our committee believes that we should work in the same direction as Shreveport because their efforts are proving to be effective. Louisiana has a large surplus in the state treasury and so does Arkansas. Hot Springs reports we also have a city fund surplus. We should obtain funds for additional police officers and communications equipment as soon as possible from these funds.

It was discovered from numerous interviews that most citizens in the Hot Springs community were not aware of how few police patrol officers and sheriff’s deputies are actually working at any given time. For example, we were shocked to discover that Hot Springs typically has only 5 or 6 patrol officers on duty and found that this number is occasionally, only 4. While not directly related to

crime but definitely having an impact on public safety, some citizens do not realize that South Hot Springs does not have a fire station. While not fully substantiated, it appears that our police department may have disproportionate police supervisory personnel compared to working officers, a condition indicative of departments that have not sufficiently increased their ranks with new entry level recruits but continued with promotions. The bottom line is that we do NOT have enough police officers. We do not have enough community oriented programs. We do not have an adequate visibility of officers. We do not have a properly funded Drug Task Force. We do not have officers who are familiar with their beats and the businesses or citizens in those beats mostly do not know the officers who patrol their beats. These inadequacies sound almost exactly like those being corrected by Shreveport to turn their crime situation around.

It was discovered during our research that Hot Springs police have old, antiquated, radio equipment for which parts are no longer available. We discovered that Homeland Security now requires law enforcement and all area emergency personnel to have radios with compatible and multiple frequencies so that the various agencies can communicate with each other. Our police do not have this capability and have not been provided the funding to obtain this equipment. Our police do not have mobile data terminals (MDTs). The report section titled "Hot Springs Police Department Technological Challenges" identifies these needs very well.

The "City of Hot Springs Strategic Plan" is actually a survey devised by the city manager in 2006 to obtain information from the public. Although there is a section titled "Law Enforcement," there is no section on crime. In spite of this fact, the first two survey pages in the Law Enforcement section include the following comments:

"Bust down on crime." "Improve crime rate." "Clean up the rampant crime." "Get out of your offices and try driving around..." "It is important to keep control of crime." "Decrease in crime." "What's wrong? The allocation and distribution of police officers..." "Need more police patrols..." "Police enforcement very poor in this fine city." "Consider eliminating crime and vandalism." "Need control over drug and crime." "Focus - serious drug problem." "Patrol residential areas..." "Too much crime." "Stop the crime wave!" "Public safety is the most important thing." "Address drug issues with a firm no tolerance stand." "Area after dark does not feel safe." "Give the HSPD a big raise. They certainly deserve it." "Much more police protection..." "Keep crime rates down." "Better law enforcement." "Continue efforts in reducing area crime." "We desperately need after dark police protection..." "Too much crime & too many repeat offenders." "We should focus on citizen's right to enjoy life and security in all neighborhoods and communities." "A strong public commitment to control crime..." "I have fear to take my grandchild to walk or play." "Need to rid our city of crime, gangs, drugs and violence." "Get even stronger on crime." "HS seems to be a haven for petty criminals and druggies."

The three comments we selected as most properly identifying our immediate crime problems are: "The truth hurts but denial will only prolong the problem." "Stop denying the fact Hot Springs has a serious crime problem and start dealing with it." "Stop criticizing the crime reports as being faulted."

From this (attached) survey, it is apparent that our citizens recognize that crime in Hot Springs is out-of-control. It is extremely disappointing that our city leaders do not or choose not to also recognize this sad fact. During our research on crime, it was particularly disappointing to watch how our city leaders were talking about how to spend their "surplus" of funds without ever even mentioning our

crime rate or the needs of our police department. It is also disturbing to note how our city leaders can consider that a new city hall building is a higher priority than our out-of-control crime rate. When city leaders put buildings ahead of public safety, we are really in trouble.

The real “bottom line” that the collected data proves beyond any reasonable doubt is that crime in Hot Springs can justifiably be described as “epidemic.” The Public Safety Committee of the Garland Good Government Group does not anticipate that this report will move our city leaders to action or to develop programs and plans that will have an immediate or direct impact on our out-of-control crime problem. For this reason, we will continue our work and expect to include necessary planning, recommended programs, and education of our citizens as to the severity of the problem. Our primary immediate focus will be to encourage our city leaders to provide proper funding and resources to our law enforcement agencies. We strongly recommend that their first step be to dedicate whatever surplus funds and resources they presently have toward combating crime. Ignoring our crime problem is not working.