



Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor

Executive Order

NUMBER FORTY-ONE (2024)

LAUNCHING THE NEXT-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP TO COMBAT GANGS AND GANG VIOLENCE ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor of the Commonwealth, I hereby issue this Executive Order to build on our Administration's successful efforts to combat the crisis of gang activity within the Commonwealth of Virginia by establishing a statewide gang and community violence prevention partnership and enforcement strategy to confront gang violence, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and violence committed with firearms, and to provide support to communities and victims.

Importance of the Initiative

National and International Criminal Organizations Drive Gang Violence, Drug Trafficking, Human Trafficking, and Violence Committed with Guns in Virginia

Criminal street gangs are responsible for an alarming percentage of violent crimes committed throughout Virginia. There are approximately 33,000 gangs in the United States with over one million gang members. Gangs in the U.S. are responsible for approximately half of the violent crimes in most jurisdictions.¹ National and transnational gangs extend their reach to nearly every corner of the Commonwealth including jails, prisons, and even juvenile facilities. Gangs are linked to assaults, homicides, brutal robberies, drive-by shootings, extortion, drug trafficking, prostitution, and human trafficking, accounting for some of the most significant threats to public safety in this state. Virginia law enforcement agencies are currently combating over 650² identified criminal street gangs and criminal organizations with local, national, and international reach. These organizations touch almost every jurisdiction in the Commonwealth and leave lasting, devastating impacts.

While these statistics are alarming, large national gangs such as MS-13, the Pagans, and associations of the Bloods and Crips have established a strong presence. Law enforcement is now dealing with the influx of Tren de Aragua, a dangerous gang that originated in Venezuela and terrorized South American countries for several years. Tren de Aragua is known for murder, drug trafficking, sex crimes, extortion, and other violent acts.

¹ See World Population Review, *Gangs by State 2024*, available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/gangs-by-state>; <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/000d265de2a74cada1a21ff555b6dd3e>.

² Department of Juvenile Justice Behavioral Investigations Unit.

National-level gangs pose a significant threat to suburban areas because of increased connections with transnational criminal organizations and Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs). These relationships provide gangs with access to international sources of supply for illicit drugs that they commonly distribute in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Federal law enforcement officials have documented connections between transnational DTOs and 11 national-level street gangs, six national-level prison gangs, four national-level Organized Motorcycle Gangs, two regional-level street gangs, one regional-level prison gang, and three local prison gangs.

Mexican DTOs, according to law enforcement reporting, are strengthening their relationships with U.S.-based street gangs, prison gangs, and Organized Motorcycle Gangs, involving them in their drug trafficking operations. Mexican DTOs routinely use gangs to smuggle and distribute drugs, collect illicit proceeds, and serve as enforcers. In addition, Mexican DTOs often use gang members as retail-level drug distributors, creating an additional layer of protection between DTO members and law enforcement. Law enforcement officials report that Mexican drug traffickers affiliated with the Federation, the Gulf Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and the Tijuana Cartel maintain working relationships with at least 20 street gangs, prison gangs, and Organized Motorcycle Gangs.³

Gangs are continuing to grow and spread their violence by recruiting new members. Often, these recruits are from the most vulnerable groups in our society who are lured into the gang with the promise of family and protection. Gang recruitment increasingly occurs at a young age, sometimes as young as 10 years old.

While, overall, there has been a decrease in inmates housed with the Department of Corrections since 2019, there has been an increase in confirmed gang members within the Department, from 12.8% in December 2019 to 17.6% in August 2024. During that period, of these inmates who were gang members, approximately 75% of them had violent, serious offenses, with recent numbers jumping to nearly 80%. Likewise, the number of gang members on probation or parole having a violent offense history increased to 56% of the current probation or parole population.⁴

Fighting Back with Operation Bold Blue Line, Operation Ceasefire, Operation FREE Virginia, and the VSP Human Trafficking Task Force

Operation Bold Blue Line, starting in 2022, has helped Virginia establish a foothold in our joint efforts to combat gangs and the violence and drugs they bring to the Commonwealth. Investments, including Operation Ceasefire and other gang violence intervention funds, were made in concert with comprehensive law enforcement, prosecutorial, and community-based

³ See National-Level Gang-Drug Trafficking Organization Corrections – Attorney General’s Report to Congress on the Growth of Violent Street Gangs in Suburban Areas, *available at* <https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs27/27612/national.htm>; see also Drug Enforcement Administration, *DEA Operation Last Mile Tracks Down Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartel Associates Operating Within the United States*, May 5, 2023, *available at* <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2023/05/05/dea-operation-last-mile-tracks-down-sinaloa-and-jalisco-cartel-associates>.

⁴ SR Inmates & Probationers/Parolees with Confirmed Gang Affiliations CY2019-CY2023, VADOC Research Unit, January 2024.

initiatives. The Virginia State Police has been working collaboratively with local law enforcement, prosecutors, and the community.

Since these initiatives began, there has been a 34% decrease in murders and a 12% decrease in violent crimes in participating cities.⁵ Combined with Operation Free Virginia, these initiatives have helped remove over 2,000 pounds of illegal narcotics that would have a street value of \$2.143 billion, including approximately 415 pounds of fentanyl. Additionally, more than \$2.7 million is tied to the seizure of assets tied to illicit activity.⁶ Finally, these efforts have produced approximately 2,100 arrests thus far in 2024. While these efforts are a successful start, we have, by no means completed the mission.

Executive Order Seven (2022), *Establishing the Commission on Human Trafficking Prevention and Survivor Support*, drove the establishment of the VSP's special unit on human trafficking. Since May 1, 2022, Virginia has opened 503 human trafficking cases and arrested 52 individuals charged with 71 felonies related to human trafficking. Multiple anti-human trafficking task forces have been created across the Commonwealth, combining state, local, tribal and federal resources to target human traffickers and those who exploit others.

Protecting Young Virginians from Gang Recruitment

In 2022, the Department of Juvenile Justice began a process of bolstering the identification and intervention methods for youth who were gang-involved. The Department implemented statewide standardized procedures and training, and increased communication with local law enforcement and members of the community. These changes allowed for a significant increase in the identification of gang-involved youth. Compared to previous years, there has been over an 800% increase in identified gang affiliation or membership. Of those with gang affiliation or membership, 70% committed a felony against a person. Identification is critical in preventing further violence as well as providing specific services to the youth.

Breaking the Prison-Gang Membership Cycle with Stand Tall Initiative

For inmates in the Department of Corrections, inmates in local and regional jails, and probationers, the *Stand Tall – Stay Strong – Stay Connected* initiative continues gang intervention and prevention efforts by providing pathways to successful re-entry, avoiding a return to a life of crime. *Stand Tall* is centered on the creation of a first in the nation, dynamic, proactive approach to supporting reentry success by measuring and acting on six key reentry success metrics: (1) gainful employment; (2) stable housing; (3) healthcare insurance coverage; (4) appropriate supervision levels; (5) necessary mental health treatment; and (6) necessary substance abuse treatment. Since April 2023, the *Stand Tall* initiative has resulted in 3,100 more returning citizens gaining employment, 7,100 enrolled in health care, 5,500 having appropriate supervision level, and 600 fewer probationers absconding (the first drop in 12 years).

⁵ *Bold Blue Line / Ceasefire Virginia Programs Successful in Getting Violent Repeat Criminals Off Streets*, The Roanoke Star, Oct. 18, 2024, available at <https://www.theroanokestar.com/2024/10/18/bold-blue-line-ceasefire-virginia-programs-successful-in-getting-violent-repeat-criminals-off-streets/>.

⁶ Operation FREE Virginia data as of October 21, 2024.

Taking Our Fight Against Gangs to the Next-Level

The next-level of combatting gangs brings together law enforcement from local, state, tribal, and federal jurisdictions with community partners in a coordinated, intelligence-driven, common-sense approach to deal with these criminal enterprises that threaten the safety and security of our citizens. Gangs must never again be allowed to operate under the cover of darkness in Virginia.

The conviction of dangerous gang members, restitution for their victims, and other assistance for victims and communities has been a top public safety priority for the Commonwealth. We must continue to ensure the dedicated people who work tirelessly to combat criminal street gang activity are equipped with the tools necessary to win this fight. Today, I propose a comprehensive plan that will support the following priorities:

- Train criminal justice personnel on the identification and interdiction of gangs;
- Deter criminal gang activity, trafficking, and violence committed with firearms through investigation, arrest, and enhanced prosecution;
- Establish the Virginia State Police as the centralized data repository/warehouse for all Commonwealth gang related data;
- Establish a Gang Intelligence Task Force composed of sworn investigators and intelligence analysts from localities around the Commonwealth. The Task Force will work to identify, document, investigate and eradicate the gangs operating in the Commonwealth. The Task Force will collect and analyze statewide criminal gang and gun violence data, trends, and intelligence to produce strategic intelligence/investigative leads which will be shared with the localities to target the gang activity in their respective areas;
- Enhance anti-gang and gun awareness training for communities and schools; and
- Enhance support for youth intervention, prevention, community partnerships and mentoring programs to reduce criminal street gang, trafficking, and associated violence in Virginia communities.

The initiatives created in this Order establish significant steps to make Virginia communities safer. Through this comprehensive approach we will enhance the already successful efforts in place across Virginia with structural coordination to drive partnership, data sharing, enforcement, education, prevention, and communication.

My Administration, in partnership with the Office of the Attorney General and with support of federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement, is committed to doing everything within our power to eliminate criminal gang and associated violence in our communities.

Directive

Accordingly, pursuant to the authority vested in me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth, and pursuant to Article V of the Constitution and the laws of the Commonwealth, I hereby order the Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security to establish

the Commonwealth Gang Prevention Partnership between the Virginia State Police, Department of Corrections, Department of Juvenile Justice, and Department of Criminal Justice Services, in collaboration with the Virginia Office of the Attorney General, and any other relevant stakeholders as identified by the initiative partners to carry out the following actions:

Launching the Next-Level Partnership to Combat Gangs and Gang Violence in Virginia

1. The Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security, in coordination with the Virginia State Police and the Department of Criminal Justice Services, shall establish a Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program to be housed in the Virginia State Police Special Investigations and Programs Division. The program administrator shall work with the Office of the Attorney General, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Juvenile Justice and, the Virginia State Police to build the Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program. Participation of federal, local, tribal, and campus law enforcement agencies shall be solicited and encouraged to foster communication across jurisdictions.
2. The Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program shall support existing gang, trafficking and violent crime task forces and intelligence groups, cover current gaps and reduce duplication of efforts, as well as provide intelligence support to the Governor's Gang Intelligence Task Force.
3. The Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security shall designate a liaison responsible for executive level oversight of the established cross-agency partnerships. This executive liaison will be designated from one of the agencies making up the Gang Governance Board and will rotate every two years.

Establishment of the Governor's Gang Intelligence Task Force

1. I direct the Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security to establish a Gang Intelligence Task Force to be comprised of all State and Local Law Enforcement agencies and the Virginia State Police, Department of Corrections, Department of Juvenile Justice, the Office of the Attorney General and campus law enforcement agencies. Participation of Federal law enforcement agencies shall be solicited and encouraged to foster communication and interdiction across jurisdictions.
2. I direct the Gang Intelligence Task Force to work with local and federal authorities to support ongoing investigations aimed at identifying and combating criminal street gangs in Virginia.
3. I direct the Gang Intelligence Task Force, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General, to leverage all available funding to meet local investigative and operational needs to combat gang violence and recruitment.

Data Collection and Dissemination

1. The Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program shall leverage all available funding and resources to expand and further develop statewide gang intelligence collection and reporting through the Virginia Fusion Center to enhance intervention, enforcement, and prosecution efforts. All available technology shall be

leveraged for streamlining, uniformity, and compliance and for data gathering and dissemination.

2. The Virginia State Police will serve as the centralized data repository/warehouse for all Commonwealth gang related data. The Virginia State Police, along with the Gang Governance Board, shall identify the data fields required to identify and track gang intelligence and related data. Local law enforcement agencies are required to send their gang related data to the Virginia State Police monthly. All information collected and disseminated shall be governed in accordance with established Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) policies, and Va. Code § 52-48. The Department of Criminal Justice Services will track this data with the Virginia State Police reporting from all localities.
3. The Department of Criminal Justice Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Corrections, the Virginia State Police, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security are the initial members of the Gang Governance Board. Others to be added as necessary.
4. The Department of Criminal Justice Services, in conjunction with the Gang Governance Board, shall establish and promulgate guidance for uniform documentation and data collection in the investigation of security threat groups and criminal gangs.
5. The Commonwealth's Attorneys' Services Council shall disseminate information to all Commonwealth's Attorneys' Offices and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and the Virginia Sheriffs Association, information regarding the victim witness programs across the Commonwealth. In addition, they will distribute information about the Witness Protection Grant Program offered by the Department of Criminal Justice Services, which includes a provision for translators and translated materials, to increase encouragement and support of witnesses during the prosecution of gang related crimes.

Prioritization of Program Resources

1. The Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program and the Department of Criminal Justice Services, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General, shall leverage all available funding for law enforcement support, technology, or investigative and operational needs to combat gangs, human trafficking and violence committed with firearms in participating jurisdictions. Areas actively supporting this initiative who show an increasing presence of gang activity or risk shall have priority for available funding.
2. The Department of Criminal Justice Services shall facilitate access to all available federal and state funding, available for localities, faith-based organizations, or non-profit community mentoring programs who desire to participate in the development and provision of gang violence interventions for youth.

Education

1. The Department of Corrections, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Department of Criminal Justice Services, to include the Office of Safer Communities, shall leverage

all resources for education, employment and workforce development to communities that are highly impacted by gangs, human trafficking and violence.

2. The Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program shall leverage all resources available to provide specialized and uniform gang training and expert certification classes for local, state, and federal law enforcement and corrections agencies on the investigation and documentation of evidence of Security Threat Groups and Criminal Street Gangs.
3. The Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice shall make gang, human trafficking and gun violence intervention programs available to incarcerated individuals and individuals returning to the community to provide exit or avoidance strategies and support.

Prevention

1. The Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General shall meet with community leaders across the Commonwealth to identify, prioritize, and incorporate identified community needs and response plans.
2. The Statewide Gang and Violence Prevention and Enforcement Program, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Virginia State Police, and the Gang Intelligence Task Force shall increase community awareness training through the “See Something Say Something” initiative to increase violence prevention and recognition in the community.
3. The Department of Criminal Justice Services shall provide gang awareness and victimization training to victim service providers, including those serving victims of human trafficking.

Gang Violence Education and Prevention for Youth

1. The Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Department of Social Services shall collaborate and explore options for the safe and appropriate handling of youth identified as possible victims of gangs, human trafficking, or violence committed with guns.
2. The Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice shall work collaboratively with the Office of the Attorney General to develop and implement a public awareness and media campaign aimed at preventing youth gang involvement, human trafficking, and violence committed with guns.
3. The Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General’s Virginia Rules Program and the Secretary of Education, shall develop age-appropriate K-12 curriculum and training on personal safety and violence prevention in schools and the community.

Human Trafficking

1. The Department of Criminal Justice Services shall develop protocols for Human Trafficking Response Teams, standards and guidelines for treatment programs for victims and maintain a list of available treatment programs and specialized services for victims of

sex and human trafficking. The Department of Criminal Justice Services will work with the Office of the Attorney General to establish these protocols, standards and guidelines.

Effective Date

This Executive Order shall be effective upon its signing and shall be in effect unless amended or rescinded by further executive order or directive. Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia, this 23rd day of October 2024.




Glenn Youngkin, Governor

Attest:


Kelly Gee, Secretary of the Commonwealth