

# Detroit police report wrong data on rape arrests

By Mark Fazlollah  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Throughout the 1990s, the Detroit Police Department's rape squad looked great, consistently reporting the nation's highest arrest rates, always at least double the national average.

Now, the city's shame-faced police department acknowledges that the statistics were wrong and its crime data are so seriously flawed that it is unclear how many suspects really were collared, although it insists that the statistics were not deliberately changed and misreported, as they have been in many other cities where police departments dismiss rape com-

plaints and try to boost their image.

The errors appear to follow the pattern of erroneous statistics for homicide arrests that were so high that they skewed national crime statistics. The fact that the city's crime data were misleading was uncovered by an investigation undertaken by the local newspaper, the Detroit Free Press.

Women's advocates are alarmed and say the phony numbers gave them a false sense of security.

Detroit's troubles highlight a national problem of police departments' inaccuracy in crime reporting—which often influences how

departments provide services to rape victims.

Increasingly, police reporting of rape nationwide has been proved to be highly flawed.

Criminologist Alfred Blumstein, of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, says police data on rape are far less dependable than reporting for other crimes because police departments differ in determining how women's rape complaints are counted.

"I don't trust the numbers," said Blumstein. "There's so much discretion in reporting."

Without accurate police reporting, women's groups can't judge whether police are solving rapes. Philadelphia police for years hid hundreds of sexual assault complaints in an effort to make the city look safer than it re-

ally was. St. Paul recently announced that throughout the 1990s, it mistakenly inflated its statistics for solving rape cases.

Detroit's problems exploded last month after news reports that the city's homicide arrest figures were so seriously inflated that they skewed the FBI's data for the entire nation. Year after year, it had told the FBI that it arrested about five times as many suspects as it really charged in killings.

In mid-April, a top Detroit police official confirmed that the problem appeared to extend to crimes beyond homicide.

Commander Dennis Richardson of the department's Major Crimes Division told the Detroit Free Press that his department had asked the FBI to help Detroit straighten out the problem

with the city's crime statistics. He said the FBI team already had uncovered several problems.

FBI spokesperson Mary Victoria Pyne said it was clear from their initial meeting that Detroit police "really don't have a good understanding of the uniform crime reporting system." She said another FBI team soon will "do some massive training" in Detroit.

Detroit's rape arrest statistics were off the mark as well, more than twice the national arrest rate. For example, in 1999, the FBI reported 89,107 rapes and 28,830 rape arrests—three arrests for every 10 rapes. The Detroit Police Department that year reported 790 rapes and 648 arrests—eight arrests for every 10 rapes.

Detroit Deputy Chief Bridges said last week that the problems in reporting

homicide arrests were caused in part by the department's antiquated computer system, which also keeps statistics on rape and other crimes.

Wendy Wagenheim, spokesperson for the Detroit chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said her organization had serious concerns about the police department's misreporting.

"In order to adequately evaluate, you've got to have a decent system of measurements," Wagenheim said in an interview.

The ACLU also is concerned that Detroit's inflated arrest numbers may reflect widespread use of unconstitutional detentions of witnesses. Police have acknowledged that questionable detention practices were used by some homicide detectives, and Wagenheim said it is (See Rape, Page 16)

## Principal

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she showed no immediate signs of physical injury.

"The family is very, very relieved and very grateful that their prayers have been answered," said Jerry Kaifetz, a friend of the girl's family who was at their home when the FBI called with the news.

Nick Thiros, Beith's lawyer, was in court and could not immediately be reached for comment.

The girl's parents and Beith's parents had received separate letters from the two on Monday. The letters were postmarked Friday in Oklahoma City.

FBI agent Charles S. Porucznik said the girl's letter was short and upbeat, "just letting her mom and dad know she's OK."

The girl's father said his daughter wrote that she was "all right, that she has new clothes, and is sorry that she's putting us through this."

But he added: "She thinks this is OK. She thinks she's in love. I'm not even sure she understands what's wrong."

Beith told his parents how remorseful he was, asked them to apologize to everyone at the school and said without elaboration that his actions had been misunderstood.

"He wrote about how he had to run very fast," Porucznik said.

The Baptist school recently sent a letter to parents saying Beith was no longer employed at the school.

Beith was arrested in 1990 and was charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor after being caught partially undressed with a 15-year old girl.

He became Liberty Baptist's principal in 1998 when his father resigned after being arrested for allegedly soliciting a male undercover police officer for oral sex.

Charges against both Beith and his father were dismissed after they underwent counseling.

## Choices

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Of his NBS partners, Miller said, "They're the ones who can fund it. We've been talking about this for the last week. I'm drawing up the contracts now."

Participants will "learn complete operations of a recording studio and will record a CD as a finished product," Miller said. "I'm securing a facility right now. I have three to choose from."

Registration for the course, which will begin on June 18, will be accepted through June 13. Those interested should call Nevada Business Services to apply.

Meanwhile, Miller will do the advance work. "We're going to do fliers for all the schools, advertise it in the newspaper and make public service announcements on the radio," he said.

To the individual looking for another chance to alter the course of his life for the better, Our Choice is trying to send a message. "Welcome back to the community," said Miller.

# Cincinnati city manager gives resignation

CINCINNATI (AP) — The city manager resigned last week as a councilman pushed for a vote on whether he should be fired in the aftermath of rioting over the police shooting of an unarmed black man.

The City Council voted 5-4 to accept the resignation of John Shirey from his \$149,000-a-year job of running the day-to-day operations of the city.

Jim Tarbell had pushed for a vote to immediately fire Shirey. The councilman said the manager failed to show leadership during three nights of rioting last month and Tarbell had lost faith in him.

On April 7, Timothy Thomas, 19, who authorities said ran from police, was shot by a white officer. Dozens of people were injured and more than 800 were arrested in the city's worst racial unrest since the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

Shirey is to receive a \$70,000 severance payment when he steps down Dec. 1, after eight years in the job. That day, the new council members and mayor who will be elected in November take office.

Also Wednesday, the council voted 5-4 to commit the city to mediation to try to resolve a federal lawsuit that accuses police of racial profiling.

The lawsuit was filed in March by the American Civil Liberties Union and a group of black activists who said they and others have been harassed by police.

The city will work with representatives of black citizens and others, including the Cincinnati police union, to try to resolve the lawsuit. Blacks account for 43 percent of the city's 331,000 residents.

U.S. District Judge Susan Dlott had directed the city to tell her by Thursday whether it would accept mediation.

# JOHN RHODES

for  
CITY COUNCIL

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## 8 YEARS - 8 REASONS

- ✓ 1) Fiscal Accountability
- ✓ 2) Created District Representatives
- ✓ 3) Led Redevelopment Efforts
- ✓ 4) Fought for Minority Business
- ✓ 5) Renovated Old Parks
- ✓ 6) Created Economic Opportunities
- ✓ 7) 7,500 Acre Project
- ✓ 8) The Civis Bus

**VOTE FOR JOHN RHODES ON JUNE 5.**