

Crime down in U.S. but more people locked up

By James Wright

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Crime has steadily declined over the past three decades but there are more people in jail for reasons that have nothing to do with the severity of their crimes, according to a new report.

The study, "Jailing Communities: The Impact of Jail Expansion and Effective Public Safety Strategies", was released recently by the Washington, D.C.-based Justice Policy Institute.

Co-authored by Amanda Petteruti and Nastassia Walsh, the report said that communities are bearing the cost of a massive explosion in the jail population and that jails are now warehousing more people — who have not been found guilty of any crime — for longer periods of time than ever before.

Because of the rising costs of bail, people arrested today are much more likely to serve jail time before trial than they would have been two decades ago, even though crime rates are nearly at their low-

est levels in 30 years. Additionally, the report said that the jails are filled with people with mental health issues, immigration violations and those who are homeless. It states that six out of 10 people in jail are struggling with their mental health.

Petteruti, one of the co-authors, observed: "Twenty percent of the people in this country's jails are not legally guilty. They have not been convicted of anything and yet they are sitting in jail. That's not right and it doesn't make sense."

Petteruti used the example of recently deceased rhythm and blues singer Sean Levert as an abuse of the system. "Sean Levert died in a jail in Cleveland because he did not pay child support," she said. "I know that we have to hold people accountable, but do we have to put people in jail for that?"

Jailing has a steep fiscal cost. In 2004, local governments spent a staggering \$97 billion on criminal justice, including police, the courts

and jails, the report said.

More than \$19 billion of county money went to financing jails alone. On the other hand, the report said that local governments spent just \$8.7 billion on libraries and only \$28 billion on higher education.

"These counties just cannot afford to invest the bulk of their local public safety budget in jails, and we are beginning to see why — the more a community relies on jails, the less it has to invest in education, employment and proven public safety strategies," Walsh said.

The report said that there are racial disparities in who gets to stay in jail. Latinos are most likely to have to pay bail and the least able to do it.

Blacks are nearly five times as likely to be incarcerated in jail as Whites and three times as Latinos. Immigration violations are being jailed at an increasing rate, up 500 percent in the last decade, the report said.

Los Angeles County, Calif., has the most people in its jail system with 19,062, ac-

cording to the report that drew on Department of Justice's Bureau of Statistics data. Washington, D.C., is ranked 30th with 3,214 people jailed.

Philadelphia County, Pa., has the nation's highest incarceration rate in jail per 100,000 with 602. The District is ranked seventh on that list with 553.

Baltimore statistics were not compiled because the

number of people held in prison and jail are not counted separately. Prince George's County was not included in the report because it does not have enough inmates in the sample population.

"Prince George's jail population was not large enough to be included in our survey," Petteruti said. "Its inmate population is 1,450 and it is not among the 50th

largest in the country, even though it is close."

The report confirms the growing trend of incarceration in the United States. The Sentencing Project, a District-based organization that studies and advocates for fair sentencing patterns, stated in 2006 that the U.S. leads the world with people incarcerated with 7 million behind bars, on probation or on parole. (See *Crime*, Page 11)

Probe

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rights, looking to meet with the two. He also criticized local elected officials who have not spoken out about the verdict, warning an act of citywide civil disobedience.

Conyers, who serves as chairman of the House of Judiciary Committee, met with the Bell's family on Monday following the verdict. At a press conference following the meeting, Conyers said, "We're going to end police brutality everywhere." He is talking with the attorney general of the United States and said that his committee plans to have its own hearing.

Also visiting the site where Bell was killed, Conyers is lobbying for the U.S. Department of Justice to bring federal charges against the three police officers who were found not guilty in the 50-shot killing of Sean Bell. Reports indicate that a consultant to the

Detectives Endowment Association, the group in support of the three acquitted officers, approached Conyers looking to tell their side of the story.

Comptroller Bill Thompson was in attendance at the meeting and said in a statement that he was "shocked and disappointed" by the verdict and that the meeting with Conyers was a step forward in the right direction. He said, "I was proud to stand with Chairman Conyers, Chairman Rangel, Congressman Meeks and other public officials to announce our joint efforts to seek federal recourse and am hopeful that the Justice Department's review of the case will be thorough and objective and finally provide justice to the Bell family and the other victims of this tragic incident."

Cyril "Josh" Barker writes for the *Amsterdam News*.

Diddy

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"I've had great parties with no celebrities there, great parties with tons of celebrities. We're all people," Combs said. Asked about the fest's rumored price tag, Combs smiles and responds: "It's up there, but I can't confirm it's \$4 million. It's priceless."

Wearing a royal blue sweater over an elegant shirt and tie, with cufflinks shimmering next to a Cartier watch, Combs said he hasn't rewarded himself for the Walk of Fame star with any new toys or baubles. "We going through a recession right now, so I'm cutting back," he said. "Whatever I don't need, I'm just not buying it."

But he does have a few suggestions if friends are worried about what to get a guy who seems to have everything: "This party that we're throwing, it is a gift. I'm not going to turn down a gift. So if somebody wants to buy me a Maybach or a house in Beverly Hills, I'll accept it."

More seriously, Combs said he hasn't yet decided yet whether to file a lawsuit against the *Los Angeles Times*, which last month retracted a March story implying that associates of Combs were behind a 1994 assault on Tupac Shakur, and that he knew about it in advance.

"I don't have nothing against them now," he said. "And if I sued them, they'll understand it's business. It's not personal. Just like if they were going to write a story about me, it wasn't really personal, it was business. But they didn't handle their business the right way. I was happy that I kept my faith in God and that the truth came out as quick as it did."

The man who launched the careers of Notorious B.I.G. and Mary J. Blige said he's back in the studio now, tinkering in preparation for another album. He's is utterly unabashed about utilizing reality TV or the occasional publicity stunt — relieving himself on YouTube, for example — to further his ambitions (fragnances! liquor! marathons!).

"I'm a definition of how to build a brand and a 360 model. I feel like I'm the definition of that," Combs said. "This new concept that people have, I've been doing it for years. Creating a way out of no way, making lemonade out of lemons, that's what I do."

"So if the music industry's getting cannibalized by the Internet, I figure out how to work with it, I figure out how to survive. You throw me in the jungle butt-naked, I come out with a lion's head, some bearskins and a bunch of food. I may be driving a Maybach."

Your Horoscope Says... May 8-14

ARIES

Busy week. You'll want to get up with the birdies, and you may even want to whistle a happy little tune. You'll be very much in demand for your expertise and positive attitude. Way to go!

Soul Affirmation: I enjoy the act of adoring.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 16, 19

TAURUS

Center yourself at every opportunity during this busy week, and keep your quest for emotional and spiritual balance in the forefront. Make an effort to take your time; that way you'll recognize opportunity from impulse-control problems immediately.

Soul Affirmation: My spirit gives me limitless possibilities.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 23, 36

GEMINI

Happiness arrives and sits on your shoulder like a bright butterfly this week. A relationship can make significant progress if you stay open to love. Keep your evening free for romance in a social setting.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for who I am this week.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 22, 44

CANCER

Take charge of a project at work and get it finished up. It's been languishing on someone else's shoulders and desk for way too long. A sensible outlook will get you far this week. Forget about all grudges and move forward in love.

Soul Affirmation: My hunches work well for me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 12, 48

LEO

You may find yourself faced with many distractions this week, but you'll sail through and accomplish much if you stay focused on each task and take them one at a time. You know you can do it this evening.

Soul Affirmation: Money opens doors for friendship to enter.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 32, 46

VIRGO

Creativity is favored and yours is especially favored with some project that you've been working especially hard on. For the next few days watch for a romance that will bring special gifts.

Soul Affirmation: I care deeply about the feelings of others.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 17, 29

LIBRA

Your new ideas combine well with your will and skill. You get a lot done at work this week. Be soft and forceful. Make time for family life this week. Your rewards come from those who are related to you by blood.

Soul Affirmation: I let positive emotions carry me through the week.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 22, 36

SCORPIO

Before you spend your money, check the quality of the goods. This rule applies to intangible goods as well. Make the first move with your honey this week. Be sweetly aggressive.

Soul Affirmation: The enjoyment of good food is high on my agenda this week.

Lucky Numbers: 21, 34, 45

SAGITTARIUS

Let your creative juices flow. Advice from a child has a reward in it. On the job, coworkers will help you expand your sense of accomplishment. Only you can stand in your way. Never underestimate the power of silence.

Soul Affirmation: I enjoy learning new things about myself this week.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 35, 40

CAPRICORN

Opportunity knocks this week, be ready and waiting. An old love resurfaces. This week is good for you financially. Look for a special opportunity at work. Families matters; spend time with yours.

Soul Affirmation: I let myself experience my true ambitions this week.

Lucky Numbers: 19, 30, 40

AQUARIUS

Quit rushing around. You frequently help others, so why are you troubling over asking for the help you need this week? Ask and when you receive say Thank You! You are blessed with many supportive friends.

Soul Affirmation: I smile and trust in the powers beyond myself.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 23, 53

PISCES

The influence of someone close can make all the difference in the world. Don't go alone. Your achievements are closely tied to someone who might not have agreed with you in the past.

Soul Affirmation: The grandeur of my presence reflects the sunshine of my soul.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 24, 37