

NJ CITIES SHOW CHANGE IN POLICING AFTER LAYOFFS



An interesting post-layoff trend has been emerging in several different police departments in the Garden State recently. The departments in question have been cited by experts who have noticed a trend in fewer arrests for minor crimes. While an optimist may say that maybe fewer people are simply committing small crimes, analysts are looking at it as a policing issue that crops up after the forces has been reduced to cope with budget problems. These experts think that the trend in letting more small crimes slide will lead to a larger problem with more serious crimes. The five cities mentioned in the analysis made by the Associated Press included: Newark, Trenton, Paterson, Atlantic City and Camden. These cities all have a few things in common, besides being in New Jersey. They are all urban areas with dense populations. They are all cash strapped with little help coming from the state and federal levels to alleviate the fiscal pressure. In addition all five of these cities have made serious cuts to their police forces in 2010 in order to stay afloat. The analysis looked at data from municipal courts. This data showed that when police officers are let go the department shifts in order to focus their new lower level of resources on serious crimes, instead of on the smaller ones. This means a drop in enforcement for minor crimes and traffic violations. At first glance you have to wonder what other choices these cities have. After all, after a police layoff you have fewer bodies on the street. While some people have concerns about these smaller crimes leading to larger ones in the future, you cannot ignore the major crimes occurring currently in order to ticket everyone who blows a stop sign. While the analysis did not break things down by specific crimes it did talk about crimes in categories. So lets take a look at what kinds of crimes are actually going unpunished. In Newark, between the months of January 2009 and November 2010 the average number of violations marked at "other", which includes things like noise complaints and curfew violations, were given about 5,100 times a month. Since the layoffs that number has been about 2,600 a month. That is slightly more than half of the number of violations as before the layoffs. While this one may seem innocuous, numbers in other cities show a different tale. In Camden a noticeable hit came in the form of traffic violations. The number of tickets issued for moving violations, such as speeding and running stoplights, dropped from 3,820 before the layoffs to 1,850 after the layoffs. In Paterson the numbers tell an even more sinister tale. The number of arrests for shoplifting or having a personal use amount of drugs dropped from a little more than 700 each month to about 545 each month after the layoffs. It is important to note that most of these changes did not happen immediately after the layoffs. In the case of Patterson the drop data average is from five months after the layoffs. So right now all this report shows is correlation, not causality.