



FORCE SCIENCE® NEWS

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In This Edition:

- I. Mass incarceration: What's the reality of politicians' promises?
- II. Quotable quote on "mass incarceration"
- III. How you & your cell phone can help combat active school shooters
- IV. More agencies using social media to strengthen public ties
- V. Another law prof, another "cure" for bad policing

Mass incarceration: What's the reality of politicians' promises?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Force Science Institute is saddened to report the death of Dr. Richard Schmidt, a world-renowned researcher in psychology and kinesiology and one of the inaugural faculty members for FSI's certification course in Force Science Analysis. Dr. Schmidt, an emeritus professor at UCLA, succumbed at the age of 74 to a long struggle against a rare degenerative brain disease. The author of four textbooks and numerous breakthrough research papers, Dr. Schmidt developed the Schema Theory and specialized in the physiological, psychological, and biochemical bases of human movement. "Dick was a giant in his field and leaves behind a remarkable and enduring legacy in the understanding of human performance," says Dr. Bill Lewinski, FSI's executive director.

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I. Mass incarceration: What's the reality of politicians' promises?

As the presidential campaign heats up, one topic expected to attract major attention is the need for criminal justice "reform" designed to significantly ease the problem of "mass incarceration."

One candidate has already pledged to cut our prison population by more than one-quarter--over half a million inmates--within four years of being elected.

The picture drawn is one of hundreds of thousands of hapless unfortunates locked up for inconsequential, nonviolent offenses that make the US the international leader in imprisonment.

But what are the realities of prison population numbers--and of readily reducing them to any meaningful extent?

A Washington, DC-based think tank called the Urban Institute offers some sobering findings.

The Institute has created a Prison Population Forecaster that uses data from 15 states, representing nearly 40% of the national prison population. This projection tool allows researchers to plug in various potential policy changes and estimate what the impact would be on the body count behind bars.

Some of their conclusions are reported in a paper called "Reducing Mass Incarceration Requires Far-Reaching Reforms," posted on the Institute's website. [Click here to go there.](#) Lead author is Ryan King, a senior fellow in the Institute's Justice Policy Center.

"After nearly 40 years of unabated growth," roughly 2.2 million people are currently locked up in prison or jail in the US, according to the report.

Politicians and activists are fond of creating the impression that prisons are overburdened with "low-level, nonviolent" drug offenders. But King's team points out that cutting drug admissions in half (an "incredibly ambitious" goal) would shrink the prison population by just 7% by the end of 2021 and reducing sentences by 50% "would yield similar results."

About 1 in 6 offenders in state prison is incarcerated for a drug crime, "and far fewer are incarcerated for low-level drug offenses, such as possession," King writes. "Even if every person in state prison for a drug offense were released today, mass incarceration would persist."

That means that tackling mass incarceration "will require reducing admissions or lengths of stay for other offenses," King explains. Sending 50% fewer people to prison for property offenses, including burglary, theft, and fraud, "would have 1.5 times the impact of reducing drug admissions by the same amount."

Admissions for all nonviolent crimes would have to be halved in order to cut the prison population by 23% by 2021. If you cut in half the number of people imprisoned for violating probation or parole, another 14% reduction could be achieved.

But--the alarming bottom line--"dramatically reducing the national prison population requires addressing the hard stuff," King writes. That is, cutting admissions and length of sentences for violent offenses, which

account for more than half of inmates currently in state prisons.

"[T]o make a real dent in mass incarceration will require us to fundamentally rethink whom we send to prison and how long they stay," King writes. Even if total admissions for all types of offenses were cut in half or the lengths of stay were halved, the collective prison population would be reduced by less than 40%, King's paper concludes. And those scenarios, he says, "are far beyond the scope of reforms being discussed."

II. Quotable quote on "mass incarceration"

From an extensive article in the Wall Street Journal on the realities of today's policing, by former NYPD officer Edward Conlon, author of the best-selling memoir *Blue Blood*:

"When I hear about the 'nonviolent drug offenders' doing time, I can't help wondering how many of them have a shooting or three they got a pass on. There may be a growing consensus that too many men are in prison in America today, but I know that not enough from [the borough he policed] are there. The system is broken in more ways than one."

III. How you & your cell phone can help combat active school shooters

In the last 18 months, nearly 26,000 LEOs across all 50 states have committed themselves and their smart phones to a unique effort in the fight against active-shooter attacks in schools. By the end of 2016, at least 100,000 sworn personnel from federal, state, county, and local agencies are expected to be part of this volunteer program.

Spearheaded by veteran narcotics officer Nate McVicker, based in southern Illinois, the project is the outgrowth of brainstorming he and a "techie" civilian friend engaged in during an evening card game.

"I have three kids and I worry about attacks on schools," McVicker told Force Science News. "My friend and I were speculating on how to reduce the body count from active shootings, and we decided there must be a new way to use technology to get officers on the scene of an attack faster to neutralize the threat."

The upshot, after more than a year of intense R&D, is an interactive cell phone system that allows a teacher or other school staff member to alert officers who may be on or off duty near the school at the same instant he or she calls 911 to report trouble.

"This can save seconds or even minutes in getting an armed responder to the scene," McVicker explains. "And as we know, even seconds saved can mean lives saved in an active shooting."

The system has been recruiting police volunteer participants since August, 2014, and is rapidly gaining momentum. Here's how it works:

When a school registers as a protected property with a service company McVickers has formed (Guard911, LLC), each staff member at the school downloads a specially designed smart phone app called SchoolGuard. If a teacher, for example, hears or sees shooting or other evidence of a life-threatening problem, she touches a large "panic button" image on the app screen, which speed dials her through to a 911 call taker.

Simultaneously, her touch sends a covert alarm signal throughout a "geo-fenced" area surrounding the school, covering a radius of five to 45 miles, depending on how isolated the site is. This signal is transmitted via GPS to all officers currently within that area, on or off duty, who have installed a "protective network" app called Hero911 on their cell phones.

This app, available free of charge through Google Play or the Apple store, provides receiving officers with the name and address of the school and a map of the property with a dot identifying the location at which the panic button was activated. When receipt is acknowledged, receiving officers are told how many other uniformed or plainclothes personnel in the area have confirmed notification.

"You may be out of your jurisdiction and just driving through an area on vacation," McVicker says, "but if you're a member of the nonprofit Hero911 network and you are near an active-shooter location, you'll get the alarm and be able to respond if you choose, or at least have situational awareness. It's easy to imagine an off-duty officer by chance being closer to the school and able to react faster than on-duty personnel.

"After all, out of more than 880,000 sworn personnel in the US, only about 20% are on duty, monitoring a radio at any given moment."

The network can multiply the potential response pool significantly, he explains. Citing the town of 10,000 where he lives as an example, he points out that only two municipal officers are on duty during a typical shift. Yet some 50 LEOs, from feds to

locals, live in the area and others travel through it regularly. All those who happen to be within the protective radius when an emergency strikes could immediately be notified and show up to help through the Hero911 app.

When officers attempt to download the app and join the network, they are first vetted to confirm their law enforcement affiliation. And, in responding to an alarm when off duty or out of jurisdiction, they are expected to follow their individual departmental policies regarding such situations.

Besides notifying nearby officers, the panic button alert also sends an alarm to all staff members on school property so they can initiate protective procedures in their areas. Also, among other benefits, the school's official active-shooter protocols will also appear on staff members' cell phone screens for immediate guidance. Built into the technology are safeguards to prevent accidental false alarms.

At present, about 120 schools in 13 states have signed up for the protection program, for which participating properties pay an initial set-up cost and nominal monthly maintenance fee. Besides elementary through high schools, similar systems are also available for businesses, churches, colleges, public buildings, shopping malls, event complexes, and other vulnerable locales through Guard911.

The program has been endorsed by prominent active-shooter response experts, including Lt. Col. Dave Grossman and active-killer researcher Ron Borsch.

"We're at war with active shooters, and attacks are increasing," McVicker says. "We need to get the first one or two armed responders on scene a hell of a lot faster to make a difference. As the Hero911 network grows, I'm convinced that this phone app will be one critical way to reach that goal."

For more information in video and print formats and for enrollment application, go to: www.Hero911.org and www.Guard911.com

IV. More agencies using social media to strengthen public ties

A nationwide survey of more than 800 public safety professionals reveals that agencies of all sizes are increasingly employing social media in an effort to build stronger relationships with their communities.

According to the poll, conducted by Motorola Solutions Inc. of Schaumburg, IL, 55% of agencies now share information with the public via social media, and nearly 30% receive information directly from civilians through Facebook and Twitter.

"Social media is an essential platform" for improving community confidence and support," Motorola stated in releasing the findings. "It enables agencies to share information quickly, as events unfold. It helps increase transparency by having an open conversation with the public. It informs citizens on a regular basis and encourages their feedback."

Besides the deepening commitment to social media interaction, the survey also revealed "rapid growth" in the number of 911 centers that can directly receive text messages from

the public. This capability, Motorola says, is up almost 300% since a poll in 2014.

Still, only 30% of agencies can receive texts at emergency call centers. The demand is said to be growing, as part of citizens' expectations that agencies will "use advanced technology to respond rapidly, solve crimes, and act with greater accountability and transparency."

V. Another law prof, another "cure" for bad policing

Last summer we stirred a robust reader response by reporting a Berkeley law professor's proposal on how to reduce police shootings and "dramatically improve" police-community relations. Simply eliminate traffic stops, he suggested. [see Force Science News #291, 9/8/15]

Now another law school prof in another op-ed essay splashed across nearly half a page in the Chicago Tribune offers more unconventional thinking on shortening "the list of lives lost as a result of police...misconduct."

"Imagine if the first bullet in a cop's chamber were a blank bullet," writes Arthur Acevedo, an associate professor at John Marshall Law School in Chicago. "Or, better yet, if legislation mandated this requirement for state and local police departments.

"Would it help save lives?"

Without considering police lives, apparently, Acevedo argues that it would. "The benefit of this approach outweighs the burden," he declares.

Carrying a blank first round, in his reasoning, would "allow police the opportunity to assess a situation and decide if a nonlethal approach is preferable.... If a police officer needs a live round, the second bullet stands ready."

And the street cred behind this provocative proposal: Acevedo's expertise is income tax and contract law.

Have thoughts to share on this idea?! We thought you might! Send us a note at: editor@forcescience.org

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