

January 15 Press Conference DPS Remarks

Public safety remains a persistent issue as we enter the 2025 legislative session. Reports of certain property and violent crimes have risen through the pandemic, and this has exposed some gaps in our criminal justice system. Communities continue to voice frustration about crime in their neighborhoods.

These frustrations are rooted in fact. According to data from the Vermont Intelligence Center, 2024 was the third consecutive year with more than 20 homicide victims in Vermont. Our data doesn't go back far enough to tell us when we've last had a streak this long with that many homicide victims. We've seen a similar trend with reports of aggravated assaults. According to data from the National Incident Based Reporting System, reports of aggravated assaults increased 40% through the pandemic, between 2018 and 2023.

Reports of property crimes have seen some of the greatest increases during this timeframe. Reports of thefts from motor vehicles, thefts of motor vehicles, identity theft, and shoplifting have each more than doubled from 2018 to 2023, according to National Incident Based Reporting System figures. From 2022 to 2023 alone, reports of shoplifting increased 40% in Vermont. This is a concerning trend.

In response to these trends, communities around the state have been holding special meetings on the topic of public safety throughout 2024 and into 2025, even this very week in Barre. We have been following coverage of these meetings closely.

One of the main themes of these meetings is continued frustration with individuals who repeatedly commit crimes while on pretrial release for other offenses and face no timely consequence, despite repeatedly violating court orders. These frustrations are borne out with multiple examples of specific cases. For example, over one year, one individual had 230 law enforcement encounters, 69 arrests, more than a dozen arrests for violations of conditions of release, and 35 active criminal court cases. With this record, this individual was released again by a court. There are multiple examples of similar circumstances covered by the media over the past year.

In light of this landscape, policymakers may conclude that defendants should face a more significant risk of pretrial detention when they repeatedly commit crimes and violate court orders while on pretrial release. This may be the case even when policymakers fully consider the rights of defendants, including the presumption of innocence, defendants' liberty interests, and the applicable constitutional standards. With an impartial analysis of these cases, we are clearly not striking the right balance between protecting communities from ongoing harm and serving the liberty interests of a small group of defendants.

Some steps were taken last year on this topic, including Act 138, but specific gaps remain. We propose this year to clarify the circumstances in which a defendant should be detained pretrial for repeatedly committing crimes and disregarding court orders. There are various legal mechanisms to achieve this, but we are proposing to clarify the legal standard for bail revocation within existing constitutional limits.

We also recognize that some of these crimes are committed by individuals with substance use or mental health disorders, and as a result the policy conversation necessarily includes our colleagues in other state agencies to ensure people are receiving the treatment they need. But we cannot take a laissez-faire approach to those cases either; doing so is a disservice not only to the communities that are harmed, but also the defendants themselves. We are focused on empirically effective interventions for these individuals, following the well-established principles of swift, certain, and fair consequences. There is room to apply these principles more effectively pretrial, in the supervision of adjudicated cases, and also for young people in our juvenile justice system.

In the coming weeks, we hope to collaborate with key stakeholders and policymakers about these issues and build consensus on these policies together.

Notes:

Vermont – Reported Crimes Against Property Offense types with greatest percentage increases between 2018 and 2023							
Offense	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Percentage increase 2018-2023
Theft From Motor Vehicle	1152	1369	1464	1759	2419	2718	136%
Motor Vehicle Theft	263	300	260	450	595	585	122%
Identity Theft	129	222	208	208	275	280	117%
Shoplifting	1672	2022	1579	1548	2416	3388	103%
Stolen Property Offenses	160	163	145	165	239	266	66%
Credit Card/Automated Teller Machine Fraud	286	265	190	218	411	411	44%
All Other Larceny	2944	3274	2828	2873	3956	3817	30%
Counterfeiting/Forgery	201	210	189	179	310	244	21%
National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data via Crime Research Group (CRG). Offense types with the greatest percentage increases between 2018 and 2023. Source: https://crgvt.shinyapps.io/clearancerates/							

Vermont Reports of Aggravated Assault, 2018-2023							
Offense	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Percentage change 2018-2023
Aggravated Assault	661	784	711	773	969	936	42%
National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data via Crime Research Group (CRG). Source: https://crgvt.shinyapps.io/clearancerates/							

(U//FOUO) Vermont Homicide Victims		
Year	Number of Homicide Victims	Number of Gunfire Homicide Victims
2014	11	8
2015	16	13
2016	20	9
2017	16	6
2018	17	12
2019	18	10
2020	15	8
2021	11	9
2022	24	20
2023	26	17
2024	22	12

(U//FOUO) Source Note: This data is derived from the Vermont State Police (VSP) Major Crimes Unit (MCU)

(U//FOUO) Caveats: The number of gunfire homicide victims differs between VSP MCU and the Vermont Gun Violence Log as cases of self-defense and officer-involved shootings are excluded from the Gun Violence Log.

Vermont news coverage and cases regarding repeat offenders and violations of court orders between July 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024 (reverse chronological order):

- Burlington car break-in suspect arrested in Brattleboro (December 31, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/12/31/burlington-car-break-in-suspect-arrested-brattleboro/> (“Police say Yesi Garelnabi, 33, is responsible for multiple thefts from cars. He had a warrant for his arrest when police in Brattleboro arrested him. They say he also had stolen credit cards and a stolen backpack. He was released on conditions but was re-arrested a short time later after being accused of stealing from another car.”)
- Vt. man with 1800+ encounters with police arrested again (December 30, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/12/30/vt-man-with-1800-encounters-with-police-arrested-again/> (“Strong words from Burlington’s police chief on Monday where a repeat offender got into trouble yet again. . . . Burlington Police Chief Jon Murad says Reynolds has had more than 1,800 encounters with officers, the most in their records system.”)
- Vt. man crashed into ambulance, police say (December 24, 2024) <https://www.wcax.com/2024/12/24/vt-man-crashed-into-ambulance-police-say/> (“When EMTs arrived at the scene, police say the driver, James Badger, 32, of Northfield, took off. Troopers say he then turned his truck around and rammed into the ambulance. Badger eventually crashed the truck and was arrested on multiple charges including driving under the influence of drugs, negligent operation and leaving the scene of an accident. Police say they also found he had six active arrest warrants. He’s being held without bail.”)

- Scott Mason (38 years old) (pending attempted murder charge for shooting St. Johnsbury Police Officer). These active cases below are as of December 16, 2024. They do not include disposed cases (his disposed cases include convictions for aggravated assault (2019), aggravated assault (2011), domestic assault (2004), among other convictions for burglary, drug possession, and violations of conditions of release).

Date	Docket	Event
December 13, 2023	23-CR-12365	26 counts of felony forgery - filed (Essex)
December 19, 2023	23-CR-12365	Failure to Appear - warrant \$1000
February 18, 2024	23-CR-12365	Arrested on FTA warrant
March 20, 2024	23-CR-12365	Failure to Appear - warrant \$1000
March 25, 2024	23-CR-12365	Arrested on FTA warrant
March 26, 2024	24-CR-03170	2nd Degree Agg Domestic Assault - filed (Caledonia)
August 20, 2024	24-CR-08711	Leaving scene of crash and reckless operations - filed (Caledonia)
October 2, 2024	24-CR-03170	Failure to Appear - warrant \$1000 (posted same day)
October 16, 2024	23-CR-12365	Failure to Appear - warrant \$2500
October 18, 2024	23-CR-12365	Arrested on FTA warrant
November 19, 2024	23-CR-12365	Failure to Appear - warrant \$5000
December 14, 2024	24-CR-13033	Attempted second degree murder - filed (Caledonia)

- Police: Repeat offender arrested for St. Albans Town car break-ins (October 15, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/10/15/police-repeat-offender-arrested-st-albans-town-car-break-ins/> (“A woman under investigation for more than two dozen crimes in Franklin County has been arrested again for breaking into cars in St. Albans Town. . . . They say she already has 14 pending court cases and is a person of interest in 27 other cases.”).
- Burlington man charged with knife attack (October 7, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/10/07/burlington-man-charged-with-knife-attack/> (“Shawn Dudley, 37, was taken into custody for aggravated assault with a folding knife. Police say he was also charged with violating conditions that he not possess dangerous or deadly weapons.”).

- Man charged with threats over lawnmowing (October 7, 2024), https://www.rutlandherald.com/news/local/man-charged-with-threats-over-lawnmowing/article_e4f96320-84e1-11ef-b381-43bdbec641f1.html (“A Rutland man is in jail after police say he threatened to stab two people in Rutland as one of them was on the phone seeking a restraining order against him. . . . Carrero smelled of intoxicants and slurred his words Police noted that Carrero had a warrant out for having failed to appear for a court hearing on a drunken driving charge”)
- Essex Jct. man charged with breaking into cars, threatening owners with knife (October 7, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/10/07/essex-junction-man-charged-with-breaking-into-cars-threatening-owners-with-knife/> (“Hodzic faces charges including aggravated assault and larceny. It’s the latest in what police say is a rap sheet with at least a dozen felony charges and several violations of court orders.”).
- Stolen car report lands Burlington man behind bars (October 5, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/10/05/stolen-car-report-lands-burlington-man-behind-bars/> (“Leduc has multiple warrants out for his arrest. He has over 150 police run-ins and, since September 2022, has been linked to 11 stolen car incidents. . . . Police say Jeffrey J. Leduc’s criminal record includes: * 28 Failures to Appear at a Court Proceeding * 3 Escape Charges * 9 Violation of Court Order Charges with 1 Conviction”).
- Residents turn out for Burlington forum on public safety (September 21, 2024), <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/vermont/2024/09/21/burlington-residents-share-ideas-to-improve-community-safety/75306929007/> (“Attendees aired their frustrations about the backlog of cases leading to repeat offenders returning to the streets with ‘little consequence.’”)
- St. Albans City questions needle exchange programs amid growing public safety concerns (September 20, 2024), <https://vtdigger.org/2024/09/20/st-albans-city-questions-needle-exchange-programs-amid-growing-public-safety-concerns/> (“Fifteen repeat offenders give the police department the most trouble, the chief said. Diane Wheeler, a Franklin County deputy state’s attorney, also expressed frustration at the council meeting over the ‘repetitive petty criminals that are caught wreaking havoc in the community at this time.’”)
- After 6 years of increased crime, Royalton residents form public safety committee (August 14, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/08/15/after-6-years-increase-crime-rates-royalton-residents-form-public-safety-committee/> (“It’s a similar story across the state . . . repeat offenders violating conditions of release and returning to the streets because of court backlogs”)
- Judge gives repeat offender \$10 bail after arrest warrant, six open violations of conditions cases in five months (Aug 30, 2024), <https://www.benningtonbanner.com/local->

[news/judge-gives-repeat-offender-10-bail-after-arrest-warrant-six-open-violations-of-conditions-cases/article_a1ae0d28-66f5-11ef-84c7-cb9ed9589481.html](https://www.wcax.com/news/judge-gives-repeat-offender-10-bail-after-arrest-warrant-six-open-violations-of-conditions-cases/article_a1ae0d28-66f5-11ef-84c7-cb9ed9589481.html) (“I can’t speak directly on this case, but, in general, I would say a \$100 bond with 10% down makes a mockery of the system,” said Bennington State’s Attorney Erica Marthage after Phillips’s arraignment. ‘With the extremely high backlog in this state, it is inconceivable to me to allow individuals that are already on conditions of release to continue to miss court and simultaneously commit more crimes and create more victims.’”).

- Bellows Falls residents express concerns over recent robberies in Southern Vermont (Aug. 27, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/08/27/bellows-falls-residents-express-concerns-over-recent-slew-robberies-southeastern-vermont/> (“‘They get caught, they get a slap on the wrist, and in two or three days they are back out,’ said Laurendeau.”)
- WCAX Investigates: Cycle of catch and release for repeat offenders (Aug. 22, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/video/2024/08/22/wcax-investigates-cycle-catch-release-repeat-offenders/> (“Concerns over the revolving door of the justice system made us want to ask questions: How does the system work? Can anything be done to fix the issues affecting our communities?”).
- Burlington City Council considers proposal asking for new Vermont National Guard mission and other issues at latest meeting (August 15, 2024), <https://www.wamc.org/news/2024-08-15/burlington-city-council-considers-proposal-asking-for-new-vermont-national-guard-mission-and-other-issues-at-latest-meeting> (“East District Democrat Tim Doherty, a former federal prosecutor in Burlington, told the mayor there is considerable concern about how courts are dealing with repeat offenders and it is an issue that must be addressed. ‘I’m gratified to hear that you’re engaging on the question of pretrial supervised release. This is obviously a tremendous concern when we see reports of people being arrested and then immediately released and then reoffending and being arrested and immediately released,’ Doherty said. ‘What really struck me is how absolutely flagrant the criminal conduct has become. There appears to be no sense anymore that one even needs to hide the fact that you are engaged in such really serious criminal conduct.’”).
- Repeat offender back on Burlington streets (Aug. 12, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/video/2024/08/12/repeat-offender-back-burlington-streets/> (“A man with nearly 230 law enforcement encounters in the past year is back on Burlington streets again.”).

- Oft-arrested suspect jailed for murder of Morrisville man (August 8, 2024), https://www.vtcng.com/news_and_citizen/news/local_news/oft-arrested-suspect-jailed-for-murder-of-morrisville-man/article_530963a8-5597-11ef-959d-1f8c51d7f38b.html (“533 total Vermont law enforcement incidents or contacts . . . And now, one second degree murder charge. . . . At the time of his arrest, Farnham was wanted on an in-state warrant for failing to appear for a court hearing on previous petit larceny and unlawful trespass charges. . . . Many of the same friends and family who shared their fond memories of Cote also expressed anger and frustration with a legal system that has let Farnham go free so many times despite his rap sheet Indeed, frustration over repeat offenders in Morrisville has been mounting in recent years, with two community crime forums drawing packed houses to the town offices and the Peoples Academy auditorium last fall and winter.”).
- Chief demands repeat offenders be held accountable after attack on Burlington officer (July 29, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/video/2024/07/29/chief-demands-repeat-offenders-be-held-accountable-after-attack-burlington-officer/> (“Burlington’s police chief is again calling for more to be done to hold repeat offenders accountable.”).
- City of St. Albans taking more measures to address public safety (Jul. 21, 2024), <https://www.wcax.com/2024/07/21/city-st-albans-taking-more-measures-address-public-safety/> (“The city had a public safety forum in June, with 300 people addressing their concerns about a recent uptick in crime. . . . Officials hope to work more closely with state partners to make sure repeat offenders are held accountable.”).
- St. Albans clears out homeless camp after raft of complaints (July 2, 2024) <https://vermontbiz.com/news/2024/july/02/st-albans-clears-out-homeless-camp-after-raft-complaints> (“City leaders said they’re frustrated that repeat offenders are released soon after arrest. ‘The arrest is just an inconvenience in your day,’ said Cloud, explaining when someone steals from a store, they’ll get a no-trespass order and get out later that day, only to rob someplace else.”).