

OPINION

# Memphis versus Nashville: The 'cold case crisis' | Opinion

Jim Adcock, Guest Columnist Published 5:00 a.m. CT July 19, 2018 | Updated 5:38 a.m. CT July 19, 2018



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Between 1980 and 2016 Memphis accumulated 1,700 cold cases of unresolved homicides while Nashville has 1,300.

Since their population base is nearly the same, why does Memphis have 400 more than Nashville?

I am a member of the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Cold Case Working Group formulating a "best practices" guide (fall 2018) for implementing and sustaining a cold case unit.

The latest draft implicitly calls our situation a "cold case crisis"; recommends that police consider using "vetted" outside sources to help them solve more cases; and provides multiple reasons why the creating of a "dedicated" cold case unit is not a luxury but rather a necessity, suggesting it will cost us far more if we don't.

Consider this:

- In 2016 our national solve rate of homicides was 59.4 percent, the lowest ever in our society. Memphis fell well below that average while Nashville was above.
- Nashville has seven detectives working homicides/cold cases; while Memphis has two cold case detectives. Contrary to best practices, neither is dedicated to just cold cases.
- The number of homicide incidents in Memphis started rising in 2015 and in 2016 they reached their highest number ever. The figures for 2017 appear to be slightly less.
- In 2016, Memphis was second to Chicago regarding percentage of increase from the previous year. Nashville, on the other hand has remained steady until 2017 when they had a 20 percent increase in homicide incidents from 2016. That's something we need to monitor.

In my view the major contributing factor to Memphis' increased cold case numbers is due to the significant loss of manpower that started about 2011.

Since then, the solving of homicides has steadily declined reaching a new low in 2016 while the number of homicide incidents has increased, a phenomenon described in research.

With the unresolved numbers rising each year they are a cold cases crisis in the making.

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duties, the utilization of "outside" vetted help in the form of average citizens, ministrative slack thus allowing the detectives more time to investigate.

issippi State Police, among others, who have used citizens and grad students to of new eyes frequently identifies solvability factors that have otherwise been

In this time and age of beleaguered manpower and diminishing funds in their budgets, agencies need to start thinking outside the box and understand that the way of doing business in the past may not be the best way to accomplish the mission today.

The proposed "best practices" document is quite clear: to remedy this crisis, we need to invest in "dedicated" cold case teams and consider the vetting of "outside" sources to alleviate the administrative burdens that detectives are required to do, thus leaving the detectives to do what they do best, investigate.

These will solve cases, save money while justice is being served and the families receive answers.

Supporting your community and the police department are paramount to a safer and better community in which to live.

Conducting cold case investigations is an intricate part of the equation and a necessity because it will cost us far more if we don't.

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