



Lexington shootings: Progress slow when people won't talk

By Josh Kegley — jkegley@herald-leader.com

Posted: 12:00am on Oct 24, 2011; Modified: 8:11am on Oct 24, 2011

Tensions have died down and the streets have calmed, but Lexington police have not received the cooperation needed to solve a string of shootings that injured or killed almost a dozen people this month — and inspired police to start a task force to crack down on violence.

Three people have been arrested, and police have an idea of who pulled the trigger in several other cases, but more arrests would result if witnesses and victims cooperated, police spokeswoman Sherelle Roberts said last week.

It's a trend that has plagued a lot of violent cases, and getting people to talk is easier said than done, said Corey Dunn, a former volunteer for a gang-prevention program in Lexington.

Dunn, a friend of Vincent Miles, who was found slain on Oct. 11, said the "don't snitch" mantra that has confounded police across the country isn't a foreign concept in Lexington.

There are several reasons why people won't talk. Mainly they want to protect their reputations, he said. But in some cases, people are afraid for themselves and their families. It can be a matter of life and death, especially when violent criminals are released early from jail.

"It's hard as heck to tell on somebody knowing that you're going to see them in five minutes," Dunn said. "Because of loopholes, they get right back out."

Two of the three people charged in Lexington's most recent shootings were back on the street after spending less than a day in jail.

Cedric Lee Hatton, 23, and Lonnie Schooley, 21, both were charged with assault and other charges in separate shootings. Hatton was charged with shooting a rival in the back at a gas station on Martin Luther King Boulevard on Oct. 11. Schooley is accused of firing a gun at Paradise City, a night club on Winchester Road, on Oct. 7 and assaulting a woman so badly that police and paramedics couldn't tell whether her injuries were from a gunshot or a beating.

The arrests of Hatton and Schooley came during the nine-day period when 10 people were injured and one was killed by gunfire. According to court records, both men were released from jail within 24 hours of

being booked. Hatton was released Oct. 13 after paying 10 percent of a \$50,000 bond, according to court documents. Schooley was released Oct. 7, the same day he was booked, after posting a full \$18,000 bond.

Hatton has other felony cases pending and has made bail for them, too. That exemplifies a problem that has not gone unnoticed by city officials.

"We are concerned about people who commit violent crimes and who have long criminal histories being released from jail too easily," Mayor Jim Gray said.

Roberts said she could not comment when asked whether police consider the early release of violent criminals a detriment to investigating crimes.

Commonwealth's Attorney Ray Larson declined to comment, because the issue relates to cases that are pending in court. However, Larson is usually vocal about his distaste for Kentucky laws that favor releasing criminals early — or not arresting them at all — in the interest of saving money and manpower at prisons and jails.

In the past, Larson has said repeatedly that statistics show many of those released early commit more crimes.

Police have said that most of the shooters and victims knew one another and that some of the shootings appeared to be over prescription pills.

For Hatton, the Oct. 11 shooting is the third felony case the Detroit native has faced in the past year, though he has never been convicted of a felony in Lexington, according to court records. Hatton has two felony cases pending in Fayette Circuit Court.

One of the pending cases also involved a gun. In March, Hatton was charged with burglary and wanton endangerment after allegedly firing shots at an apartment building and a woman's car, according to an arrest warrant.

He was released from jail after paying \$3,000. Prior to that, he paid a \$4,000 bond involving a November incident in which police said he fled while driving the wrong way down a one-way street and gave officers a false name, records say.

Under Kentucky law, there seems to be little that authorities can do to keep people behind bars except set higher bonds, but that's no guarantee they won't have the money to pay the larger amounts.

Criminal history is one of several factors that go into determining an inmate's bond, said Tara Klute, chief operating officer of the division of pretrial services for the state's Administrative Office of the Courts.

"The purpose of bail is not to punish, it's to ensure court appearance, and we also look at likelihood to reoffend," she said.

Pretrial officers, who assess inmates when they are booked into jail, also look at things such as inmates' ties to the community, the seriousness of the crimes of which they are accused and whether they have ever fled from court supervision or missed a court date. The officers then make a recommendation to the judge, who sets final bail.

It wasn't immediately clear what judge reviewed Hatton's case — pretrial issues are considered private, Klute said. Hatton's bond originally was set at \$50,000 but was reduced to 10 percent of that as long as Hatton commits no further crimes, stays away from the victim, refrains from using drugs or alcohol, and submits to electronic monitoring.

Klute said that under state law, regardless of the crime or history, most inmates can get out before trial as long as they can afford bail. Judges may not deny bail unless the crime is a capital offense, such as murder, she said.

"It's really not an equitable system when you have money involved, but that's the system that we have," she said.

Reach Josh Kegley at (859) 231-3250 or 1-800-950-6397, Ext. 3250.

Read more: <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/10/23/1932523/lack-of-cooperation-slows-progress.html#ixzz1biajiOiC>