

Activists push for clemency

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LeGrande's case has attracted additional attention from anti-death penalty groups because his prosecutor, Ken Honeycutt, was accused of hiding a deal with a witness in another murder case. Honeycutt no longer is in office.

The claim was filed last year by the North Carolina State Bar with the state Court of Appeals. Honeycutt has denied the accusations, but the defendant in that case won a new trial.

Robinson said LeGrande, who's black, was convicted by an all-white jury and was allowed to represent himself even though he believed near

the time of his trial that Oprah Winfrey and Dan Rather were speaking to him personally through television sets.

Parker said the county is nearly 90 percent white and blacks aren't often on juries.

LeGrande refused to let lawyers appointed to represent him participate in his defense and already believes Gov. Mike Easley has pardoned him, defense lawyer Jay Ferguson said.

"He has always maintained his innocence," Ferguson said. "He believes at this moment that he has been pardoned by the governor. He believes that he is waiting for the pardon to come through

and he will be paid a large sum of money."

Ferguson said LeGrande has refused to meet with him in prison, leaving Ferguson waiting for government documents he won at a hearing last week before he can file an appeal on LeGrande's behalf.

"The problem is you have a mentally ill person representing himself," Ferguson said. "When his standby counsel asked the court to review his mental competency, the judge asked the defendant if he wanted to do that and he said no. His response was to tear up the paperwork. So you've got a mentally ill defendant making the call on whether his competency should be

examined." Prosecutors said LeGrande killed Mumford on behalf of her husband, who wanted to collect insurance proceeds and who received a life sentence after pleading guilty to second-degree murder.

Robinson said during Wednesday's news conference that his group planned to meet with Easley about the case. LeGrande is scheduled to die Dec. 1.

Melvin L. "Skip" Alston, a former head of the state chapter of the NAACP, said he was "appalled" by the case, adding that it illustrated "unfair practices of the death penalty."

Study: Violent and juvenile crime on the rise

By Lorinda M. Bullock
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON—Although St. Louis and Detroit took first- and second-place "dishonors" on Morgan Quinto's 13th annual Most Dangerous Cities list this year, crime prevention and law enforcement experts say American cities everywhere—not just the top 25—need to be concerned with a growing trend of increasing violent crime.

"For a number of cities across the country, we're seeing a significant increase in violent crime in three major areas: in robberies, in aggravated assaults and in murder," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington-based law enforcement think tank.

According to a PERF report released earlier this year, "A Gathering Storm: Violent Crime in America," 2005 numbers from the FBI showed the "largest single year percent increase in violent crime in 14 years."

Nationally, homicide increased by 3.4 percent, robberies (3.9 percent) and aggravated assaults (1.8 percent). In 2005, more than 30,600 people were murdered, robbed and assaulted than in 2004, the report said.

"(For) A number of the cities, we're seeing those increases are five, 10, 20-year highs and in some places, all-time highs. This is significantly different from what had been a pretty stable period of either decreasing crime or increases that were not as significant as we've seen in the past 18-24 months," Wexler said.

Nearly 14 cities/metropolitan areas reported they experienced those types of "crime milestones." Orlando, Fla., Prince George's County, Md., and Trenton, N.J. reported being at an all-time high in violent crime.

Wexler and other crime prevention experts agree an increase in juvenile crime along with other social problems happening particularly in low income communities and communities of color are at the root causes of these current crime trends.

"Those are the communities where the schools aren't up to par. Those are the communities with the highest amount of unemployment. Those are the communities with the least amount of government services, (and) the slowest responses even from the police," said Ronald Hampton, executive director of the National Black Police Association.

Hampton, a retired officer of 24-years from Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department remembers Washington's toughest years in the 1980s when the crack-cocaine epidemic devastated the majority-Black Capital city, making Washington often at the top of the nation's crime lists. This year, Washington was number 19 on the list, dropping from 13th place in 2005 and the sixth most dangerous city in 2004.

Hampton believes part of Washington's decline on the list is because of a recent influx of White professionals tired of commuting from Northern Va. and Md. and buying homes and condos in historically Black neighborhoods, there is a greater police presence now.

He's even skeptical of recent crime prevention tactics when the city declared a crime emergency earlier this year to address crime wave of violence and robberies. City officials quickly approved street surveillance cameras, curfews for young people and increased police presence.

Even though Wexler applauds the city's efforts, Hampton said with elections on the horizon, local politicians had no choice.

He said recent sweeps reminded him of crime sweeps in the late 80s early 90s when the police boasted the arrests of more than 53,000 people. But Hampton said it was merely a "feel good" tactic because most of the arrests were misdemeanors and not felonies associated with the violent crimes that held the city hostage at the time.

"That didn't have anything to do with stopping crime," Hampton said of the sweeps both then and now. "But it was sold and the reason why it was sold was because everybody who had something to do with it just about was running for office."

In D.C., Wexler said 42 percent of robbery arrests last year were juveniles. He said cities like Minneapolis and Boston are among many U.S. cities dealing with juvenile crime and an increase in gang activity. In comparison to 2004, murder arrests of juveniles climbed 20 percent in 2005.

Although young people are increasingly getting involved in criminal activity, Wexler said they are only one part of the problem.

"In the 90s a number of people went to prison in record numbers and I think we're seeing them coming out of prison now some 10-12 years later. So you've got an increase in juveniles and an increase in the population that is in many cases coming out of prison not any better educated or prepared for the workforce," he said. "So they're older. And if they are not able to find a job and they don't have the necessary skills, regrettably the chances of them becoming involved in crime again are higher."

Wexler's organization studies these trends and also organizes events like the "Violent Crime Summit" that took place this summer where more than 170 mayors and police chiefs from all over the country and Canada came to share ideas.

Douglas Palmer, Trenton's first Black mayor was one of the mayors in attendance. He is also the vice president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

According to this year's Morgan Quinto list, Trenton is the 14th most dangerous

city in the nation, but Palmer said the city is making great progress despite its national ranking.

"I don't measure our crime by other cities or where we are on a list. I measure our crime by what we're doing in Trenton each and every year and how those numbers change and if we're more engaged and if we're using approaches that will help us reduce crime," Palmer said.

"Since 2003, our crime has been reduced by nearly 43 percent. And from last year's statistics even to this year's we've reduced crime 23 percent. But we recognize that we have to continue to do more because we still have too much crime."

By doing more, Palmer means creating a "holistic" menu of programs ranging from ex-offender employment

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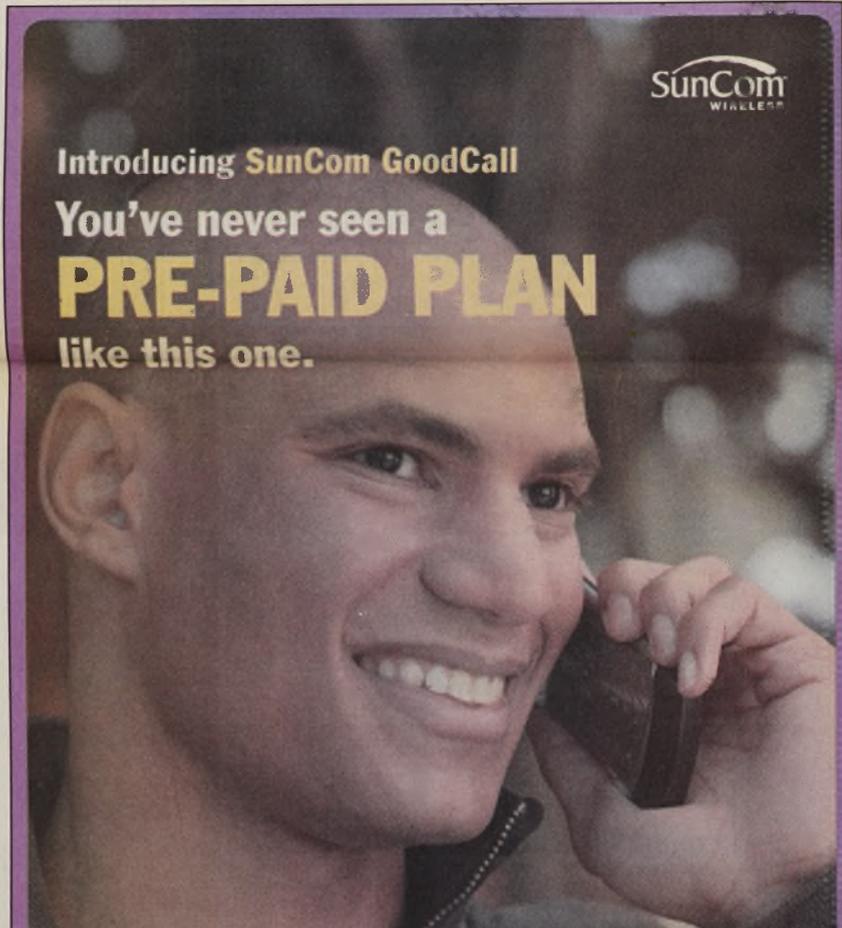
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