

**MEMORANDUM**

October 13, 2020

**TO:** Public Safety Committee

**FROM:** Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst

**SUBJECT:** Briefing: COVID-19 Related Crime and Life Safety Issues

**PURPOSE:** Briefing – No Vote Expected

Today the Committee will receive a briefing and update on changes in public safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, including crime and other life safety issues. Those expected to brief the Committee include:

Chief Marcus Jones, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)  
Chief Scott Goldstein, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)  
Assistant Chief Dinesh Patil, MCPD  
Assistant Chief Alan Butsch, MCFRS

**Background**

Since March 2020, daily life in the County has changed due to mandatory social distancing restrictions, which have included closed businesses, mandatory teleworking, school closings, and other restrictions enacted to help reduce community infection rates. Residents have been staying home, which may be the reasons many types of crime have dropped significantly. On the other hand, close quarters may increase the risk of crimes like domestic violence. Across the nation, larger jurisdictions have been reporting significant increases in violent crime, particularly homicides.

At the same time, the number of ill residents increased significantly, putting a strain on Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Today, MCFRS will provide information on its response to the pandemic and how it handled a surge in EMS call volume. MCPD will also provide information on crime trends, both for the year and specific to March – July.

## **MCFRS – EMS Response**

MCFRS made several operational changes to maximize safety for both employees and patients as it managed an influx of patients under investigation for suspected COVID-19 infection (PowerPoint attached at ©1-7). Faced with a lower inventory of PPE than projected needs demanded and knowing the care for patients with a novel virus would be very challenging, MCFRS made several changes, including modifying PPE policies to correspond to the level of risk, and adjusting clinical guidelines to better keep individuals safe and treat patients. MCFRS added transport units during peak hours and increased paramedic chase cars.

As an initial triage point with sick patients, the Department also implemented changes to help the “worried well” avoid the emergency departments using its Mobile Integrated Health unit. Certain patients were designated as “Leave at Home” or LAH. During the COVID-19 surge, MIEMSS<sup>1</sup> instituted a screening protocol for EMS to identify patients with suspected flu-like illness (which could include COVID), and who were appropriate to convalesce at home instead of being transported to the hospital. MCFRS followed up on these patients within 24 to 48 hours to ensure that they were doing well and did not need further treatment.

The Department also launched a pilot termination of resuscitation (TOR) program to test for COVID-19. In cardiac arrest situations EMS clinicians are allowed to stop resuscitative efforts after 30 minutes if there has not been improvement in the patient's condition. During the COVID-19 surge, very few of these patients were tested for Covid-19. During the summer, in cooperation with MIEMSS and the Office of the State Medical Examiner, MCFRS began testing TOR patients for Covid-19. This information will be helpful if the County experiences another surge.

## **MCPD Crime Data**

Crime rates have been very different during COVID-19. Residents’ habits changed significantly. Many national reports show that overall, crime decreased significantly over the spring and summer, although shootings and homicides have increased.<sup>2</sup> Council staff notes that traffic patterns, crimes, and enforcement changed during COVID-19, and while the Department can answer any general questions about that (including excessive speeding), the Committee has tentatively scheduled an in-depth briefing on Traffic Enforcement on October 29, and many of these issues will be addressed at that time.

While it is likely too early to tell what is driving the changes in crime, there is a strong possibility that the lack of community resources of all types has had an impact. Individuals now have diminished access to recreation facilities, certain health programs that may help with drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence resources, or larger community-based resources like religious organizations that historically have provided support.

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<sup>1</sup> [MIEMMS home page](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Crime Has Declined Overall During the Pandemic, But Shootings and Killings Are Up](#), NPR, July 20, 2020

Montgomery County has experienced varied results. The Department has prepared data that show annual crime data changes by calendar year (©10-18) as well as specific to March through July to illustrate what occurred during the height of social distancing (©8-9). For calendar 2020 (through September), overall violent crime is down (3,701 incidents in 2020 compared to 4,302) for the same time period last year. Homicides, however, have increased. In 2020, there have been 16 homicides, compared 10 to during the same time frame last year. That is a 60% increase for the year. The change in the homicide rate during COVID months is even more significant. It reflects thirteen homicides between March and July compared to four the year before.

Non-violent crime has increased, from 14,882 crimes last year to 15,131 in 2020. Notably, auto theft, commercial burglary, fraud, and larceny from autos have increased this year. These crimes were also up during March-July. During COVID-19, auto theft was up almost 25%, commercial burglary was up 20%, and larceny from autos was up 18%. Not surprisingly, shoplifting is down by almost 30% for the year. Its decrease during COVID-19 was 45%.

Of particular concern are domestic violence and firearms trends. MCPD provides annual data on firearm-related violent crime on ©11-16. There were 107 aggravated assaults with firearms in 2020 compared to 77 in 2019. The Department notes, however, that robberies with firearms have decreased by 20% over the same time period.

The number of reported domestic violence incidents have decreased each year since 2018, with 4,316 reported through September 2020 compared to 4,592 during the same time period last year. Many stakeholders are concerned that domestic violence incidents are in fact increasing during COVID-19 social distancing requirements, and that they are being underreported for a variety of reasons. Prior to the pandemic, a victim could more easily leave a violent situation and access different resources. These resources, such as family, religious groups, or other organizations are often more difficult to access now.

The Department has experienced a significant decrease in drug-related arrests and opioid overdoses. Notably, drug-related arrests have decreased due to the decrease in traffic stops, again caused by the social distancing restrictions during COVID-19. Drug-related arrests in 2020 have dropped almost 54% from the same time period in 2019. However, the Department is seeing an increase in both fatal and non-fatal overdoses. Fatal overdoses have increased 15% this year. Non-fatal overdoses have increased almost 30%.

## **Discussion Issues**

1. Some epidemiologists are predicting another COVID-19 surge during the winter. How is MCFRS preparing for that possibility, and are there any additional resources needed?
2. Prior to COVID-19, MCFRS had implemented a new Alternative Destination Protocol (ADP) pilot program where EMS transported individuals to certain urgent care facilities rather than to emergency departments. What was the status of that program during COVID? Is it something that could be used again if the region experiences another COVID surge? Or are urgent cares reluctant or not equipped to participate?

3. To what extent are Police recovering ghost guns?
4. There have been several carjackings in the news recently? Is this an increasing trend as well?

**This staff report contains:**

MCFRS PowerPoint

MCPD Crime Data (March – July 2020)

MCPD Crime Data (by Calendar Year)

**Circle #**

1-7

8-9

10-18



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# *MCFRS Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Fall 2020





# Planning assumptions for MCFRS (Feb/Mar 2020)

- No resupply of PPE for 2 months
- MC Medicare population of 100k = 15K seriously ill and 3K deaths
- Peak of pandemic 4/28, surge to occur 4/15 to 5/15
- EMS call volume of 150%
- Hospital drop off times of 2 to 4 hours
- Daily highs during surge would require 50 ambulances to handle
- Lots of worried but relatively well patients





# What did we do?

- Adjusted PPE policies to correspond with level of risk
- Adjusted clinical guidelines according to latest research to better treat patients and keep workforce safe
- Added transport units during peak usage hours
- Made all transport units BLS with ALS providers moved to chase cars
- Staffed decontamination crews at hospital to assist ambulances in return to service
- Staffed EMS700 at ECC (destination control officer)
- Assist worried well in avoiding EDs through Viral Pandemic Protocol
  - MIH cars vs universal implementation
  - All LAH patients followed up on by text message or phone call from MIH team





# What did we do – clinical changes

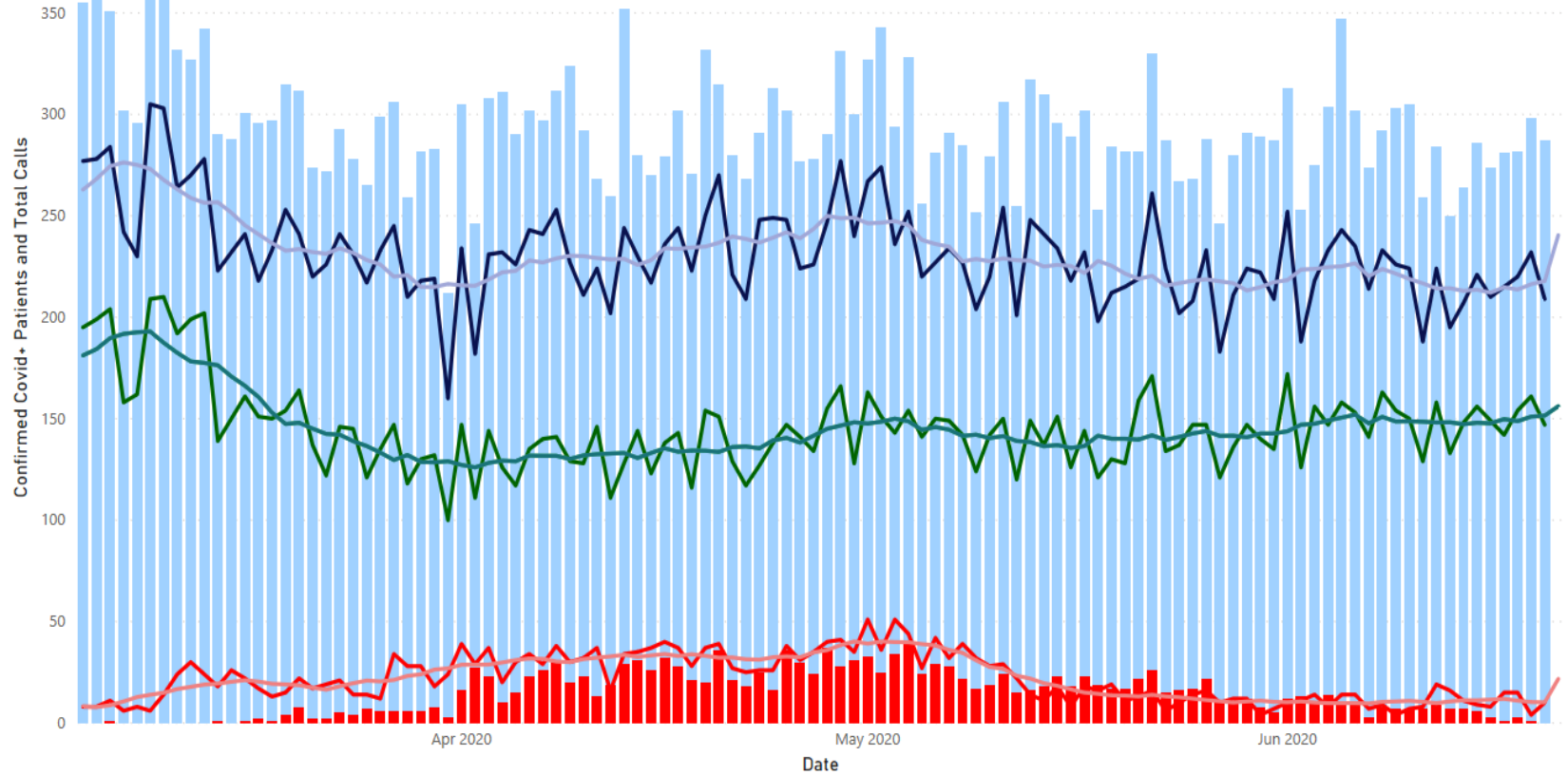
- Definitions of PUIs significantly broadened
- Better managed handoffs with hospitals of suspected cases
- Airway management included in-line filters for all invasive or aerosol generating procedures (intubation, nebulizations etc.)
- Incorporated proning into patient management to try to help patients avoid being placed on ventilators
- Cardiac arrest / Termination of resuscitation guidelines modified
- Launched pilot program to test TOR patients for COVID-19 (after peak).







# MCFRS Surge Experience



**Light blue column: Total Fire/Rescue Incidents**

**Dark blue line: EMS incidents (actual and 10 day rolling average)**

**Green line: EMS patient transports (actual and 10 day rolling average)**

**Red column: Confirmed Covid Patients**

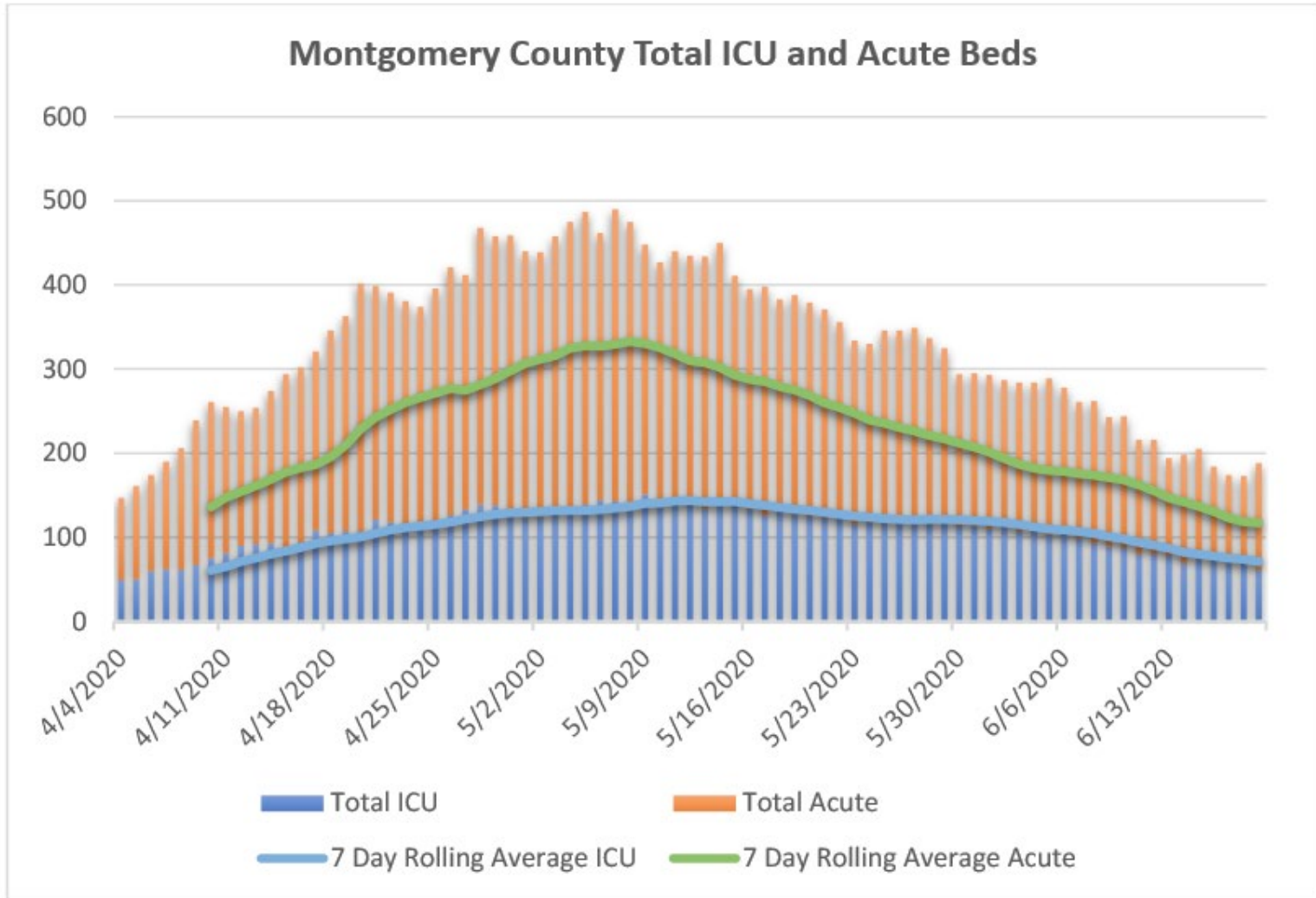
**Red line: Suspected Covid Patients (actual and 10 day rolling average)**





# Hospital Surge

### Montgomery County Total ICU and Acute Beds

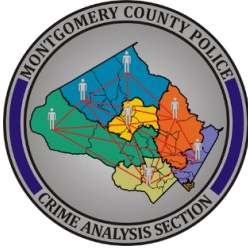




# How did we do?

- We did not run out of PPE even though supply shortages lasted well into May
- Very few employees became sick due to COVID-19 exposures at work
- We transported over 1500 confirmed cases and many more suspected
- We saw a higher percentage of really ill patients
- ALS Response times did not drop at all
- Even though hospitals surged (hard), EMS cycle times were manageable
- Cardiac arrest save rate plummeted. Most of these cases were not tested for Covid-19.





# VIOLENT VS NON-VIOLENT CRIME COMPARISON

CAS #20-895, 8/12/2020

Prepared by: M Iezzi

Request: Violent Crime vs Non-Violent Crime comparison, months of March to July for 2018, 2019 and 2020

Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date
- All categories based on number of incidents, not number of victims
- Violent and non-violent crime types of note were selected at the discretion of the author

Filters:

- Takoma Park data is not included
- Unfounded reports are not included
- Only includes incidents with a start date between March 1<sup>st</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup> in 2018, 2019 and 2020

Violent Crime Type	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020
Abduction	1	0	0	-100.0%	Not calculable
Arson	21	15	23	-28.6%	53.3%
Assault - Simple	1507	1521	1244	0.9%	-18.2%
Assault - Aggravated	253	294	275	16.2%	-6.5%
Homicide	8	4	13	-50.0%	225.0%
Human Trafficking	3	5	1	66.7%	-80.0%
Kidnapping	4	3	1	-25.0%	-66.7%
Rape	154	162	160	5.2%	-1.2%
Robbery - Commercial	24	21	11	-12.5%	-47.6%
Robbery - Individual	210	183	128	-12.9%	-30.1%
Sex Offenses - All Other	102	118	72	15.7%	-39.0%
Weapon Offenses	179	168	115	-6.1%	-31.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2466</b>	<b>2494</b>	<b>2043</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>-18.1%</b>

Non-Violent Crime Type	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020
Auto Theft	338	356	443	5.3%	24.4%
Burglary - Commercial	120	157	189	30.8%	20.4%
Burglary - Residential	453	332	306	-26.7%	-7.8%
Larceny from Auto/Auto Parts	1919	2043	2415	6.5%	18.2%
Larceny - All Other	1837	1725	1375	-6.1%	-20.3%
Larceny - Shoplifting	1157	1315	718	13.7%	-45.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5824</b>	<b>5928</b>	<b>5446</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>-8.1%</b>

This information is considered confidential and is intended for **law enforcement use only**.

Drug Offenses	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020
Drug Possession	2499	2080	659	-16.8%	-68.3%
Drug Distribution	220	212	47	-3.6%	-77.8%
Drug Offenses - Other	76	100	31	31.6%	-69.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2795</b>	<b>2392</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>-14.4%</b>	<b>-69.2%</b>

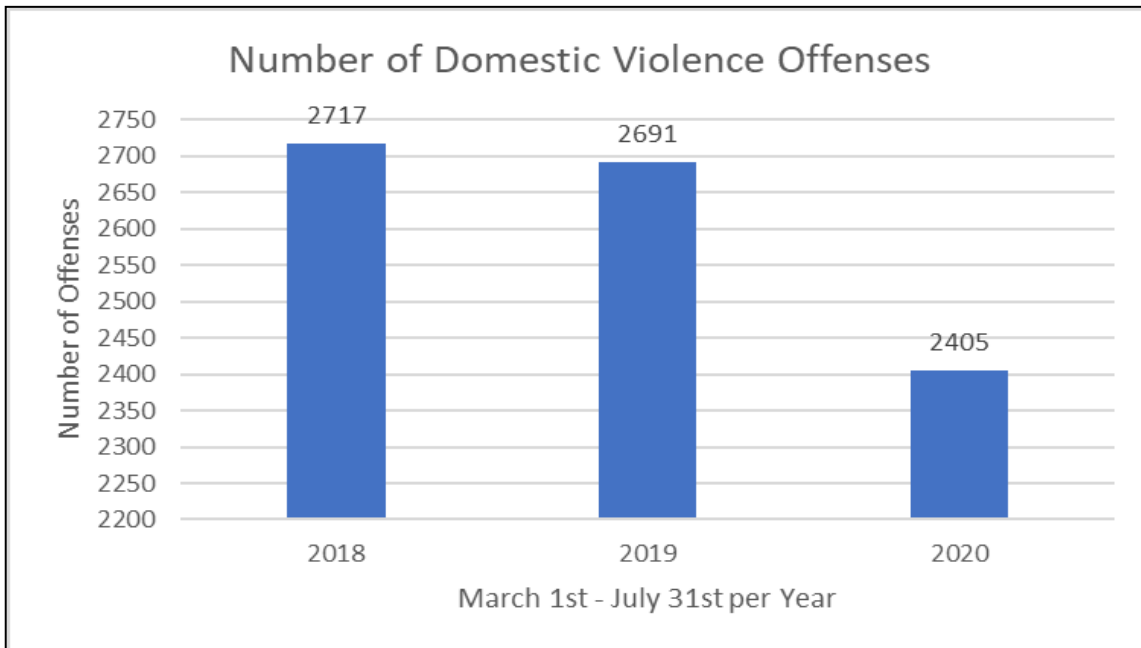
**Domestic Violence Comparison**

Data:

- Compiled from MCPD Internal EJustice database copy
- Based on recorded EJustice start date
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on report type in EJustice
  - Aggravated Assaults: 0413, 0414, 0415, 0423, 0424, 0425, 0433, 0434, 0435, 0443, 0444, 0445
  - Simple Assaults: 0813, 0814, 0815, 0823, 0824, 0824
  - Domestic abuse/neglect: 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016
  - Family Trouble: 2951
  - Homicides/Rapes – filtered on selected relationship code

Filters:

- Takoma Park data is not included



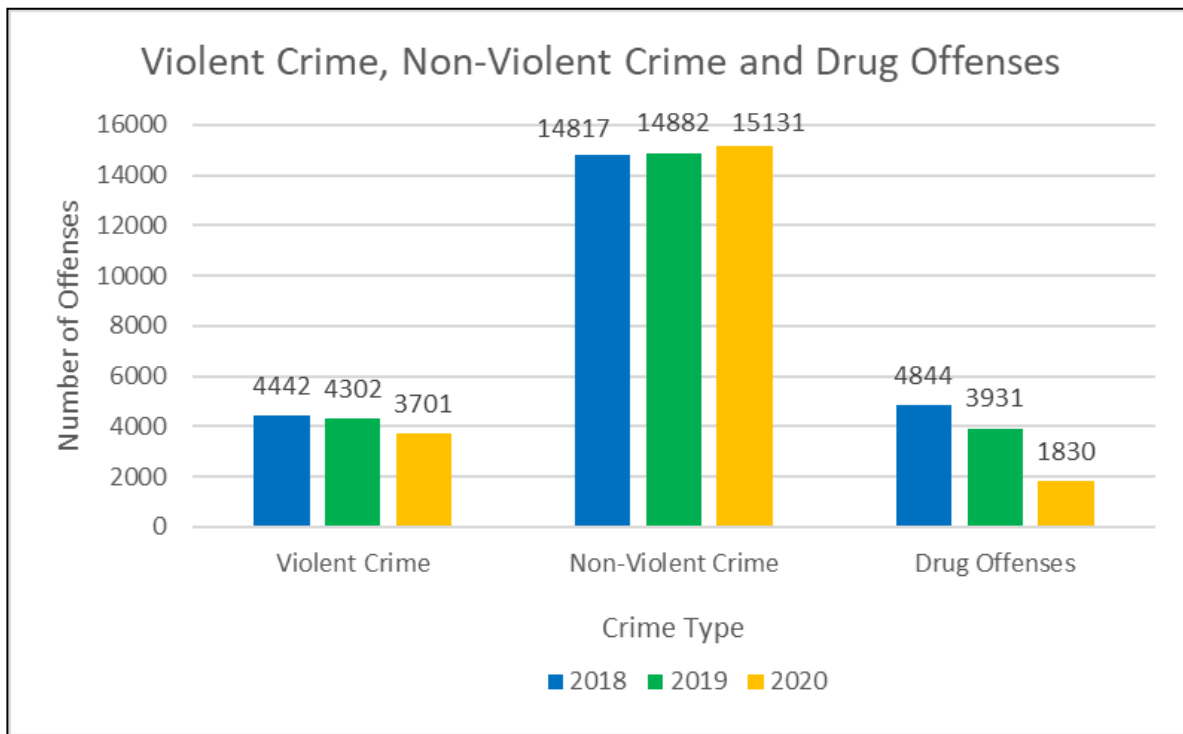


# VIOLENT VS NON-VIOLENT CRIME COMPARISON

10/9/2020

Contributing Authors: CAS Manager M Iezzi, CAS Senior Analyst P Margelis, SID Supervisor K Akinyanju, SID Analyst T Atkins

Request: Violent Crime vs Non-Violent Crime comparison, YTD for 2018, 2019 and 2020



## Violent Crime

### Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date
- All categories based on number of incidents, not number of victims
- Violent and non-violent crime types of note were selected at the discretion of the authors

### Filters:

- Takoma Park data is not included
- Unfounded reports and reports that were referred to another jurisdiction are not included
- Only includes incidents with a start date between January 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> in 2018, 2019 and 2020

Homicide is the only violent crime category that has increased between 2019 and 2020. However, 63% of the homicides in 2020 have been either domestic-related or by a known suspect.

Commercial robberies and robberies from individuals have decreased between 2019 and 2020. This is likely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Commercial establishments have been closed and fewer people are outside as potential targets.

Violent Crime Type	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020
Abduction	2			-100.0%	Not calculable
Arson	41	32	32	-22.0%	0.0%
Assault - Simple	2706	2633	2278	-2.7%	-13.5%
Assault - Aggravated	463	475	475	2.6%	0.0%
Homicide	13	10	16	-23.1%	60.0%
Human Trafficking	5	6	2	20.0%	-66.7%
Kidnapping	11	5	3	-54.5%	-40.0%
Rape	272	284	271	4.4%	-4.6%
Robbery - Commercial	48	51	29	6.3%	-43.1%
Robbery - Individual	369	348	253	-5.7%	-27.3%
Sex Offense	186	193	114	3.8%	-40.9%
Weapon Offense	326	265	228	-18.7%	-14.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4442</b>	<b>4302</b>	<b>3701</b>	<b>-3.2%</b>	<b>-14.0%</b>

### Firearm-Related Violent Crime YTD

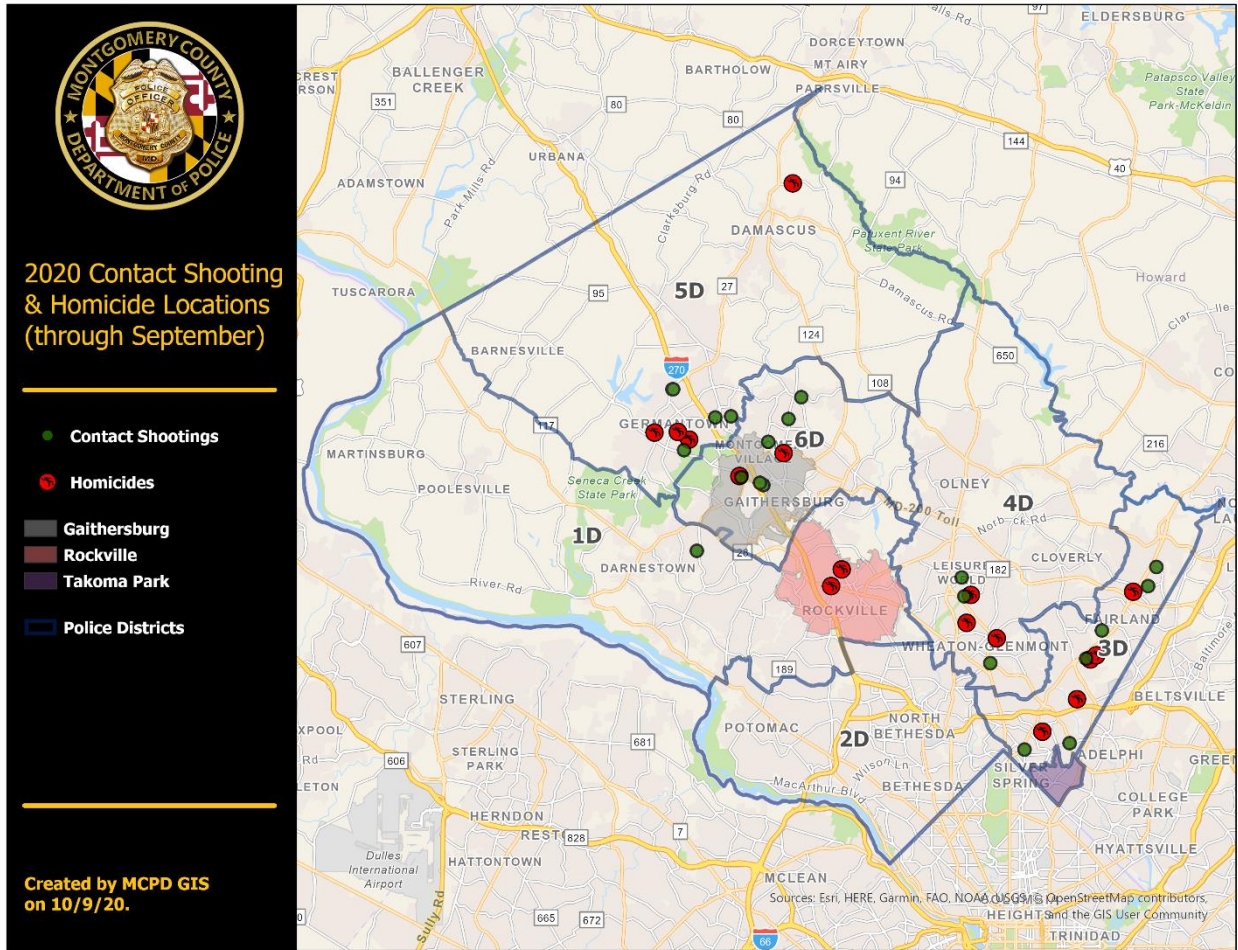
Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date

Overall, firearm-related violent crime has increased approximately 5% from the same reporting period last year. This has primarily been driven by an increase in aggravated assaults where a firearm was used. There were 107 aggravated assaults with firearms in 2020 compared to only 77 in 2019, which equates to an increase of nearly 39%. It should be noted, however, that robberies in which a firearm was used have decreased by 20% from 2019 – 2020. There were 127 firearm-related robberies in 2019 while there were only 101 in 2020. This could likely be attributed to the lockdown enforced during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing may have reduced crimes of opportunity such as the robbery of an unknown individual.

Violent Crime Type	2018	2019	2020
<b>Aggravated Assault</b>	66	77	107
<b>Homicide</b>	8	4	8
<b>Rape</b>	2	0	3
<b>Robbery</b>	110	127	101
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>219</b>





*A contact shooting is defined as an incident where a person was struck with gunfire but did not suffer fatal injuries.*

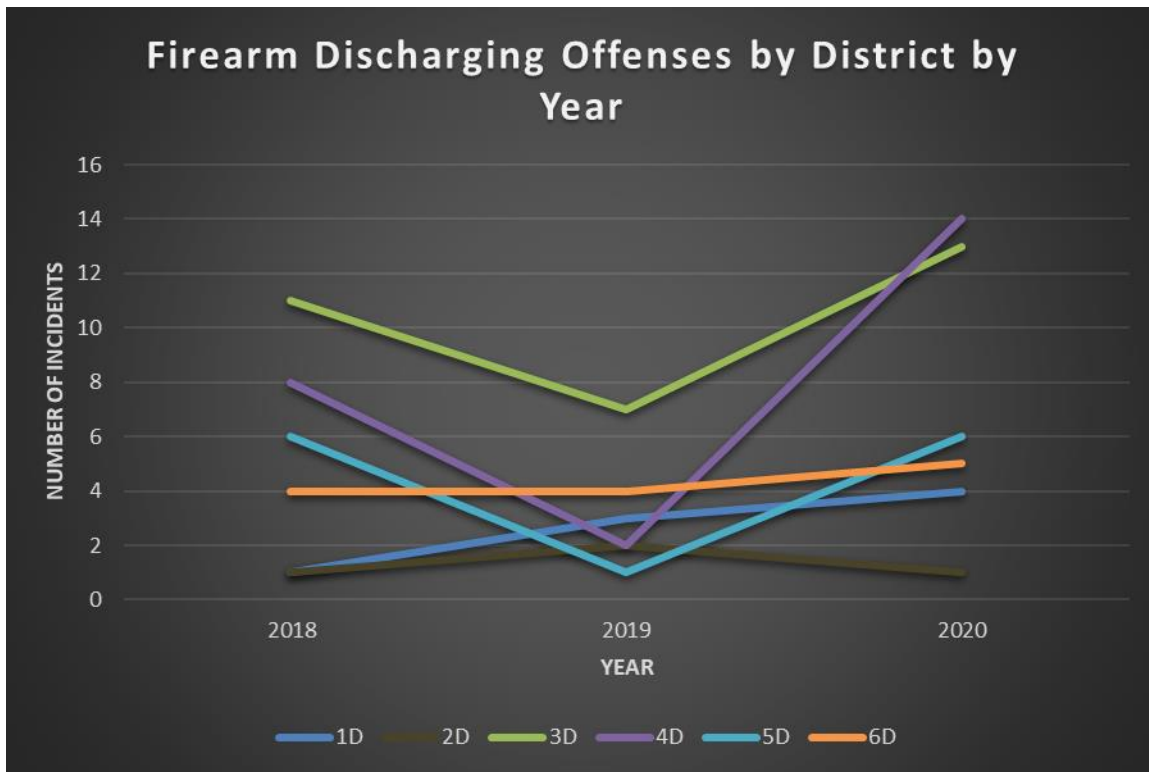
### **Firearm Discharging Offenses**

Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date

From 2018 – 2019, there was a significant decrease in weapons offenses where a firearm was discharged (-39%). However, when comparing 2019 – 2020, that decrease has been erased. In fact, the number of firearms discharging offenses have more than doubled from 2019 – 2020. The 4th District has the highest number of weapons offenses in which a firearm was discharged in 2020. The 3rd District accounts for the second highest number of these offenses this year.





A firearm discharging offense is defined as an incident where a firearm was discharged, however no known individual was struck.

### **Firearm-Related Traffic Incidents and Arrests**

Data:

- Firearm Arrests from Traffic Incidents for January through September
- Data Source: EJustice & CAD

A significant decrease in traffic stops during the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the number of firearm arrests stemming from traffic incidents, as there was a 23.9% decrease from 2019 YTD.

Offense	2018	2019	Percent Change	2020	Percent Change
Firearm Arrests from Traffic Incidents <sup>1</sup>	59	46	-22.0%	35	-23.9%

<sup>1</sup> Traffic Incidents include PDC, PDC Hit and Run, PIC, Traffic Problem on Patrol, Traffic Stop

## Weapons Offense Charges YTD

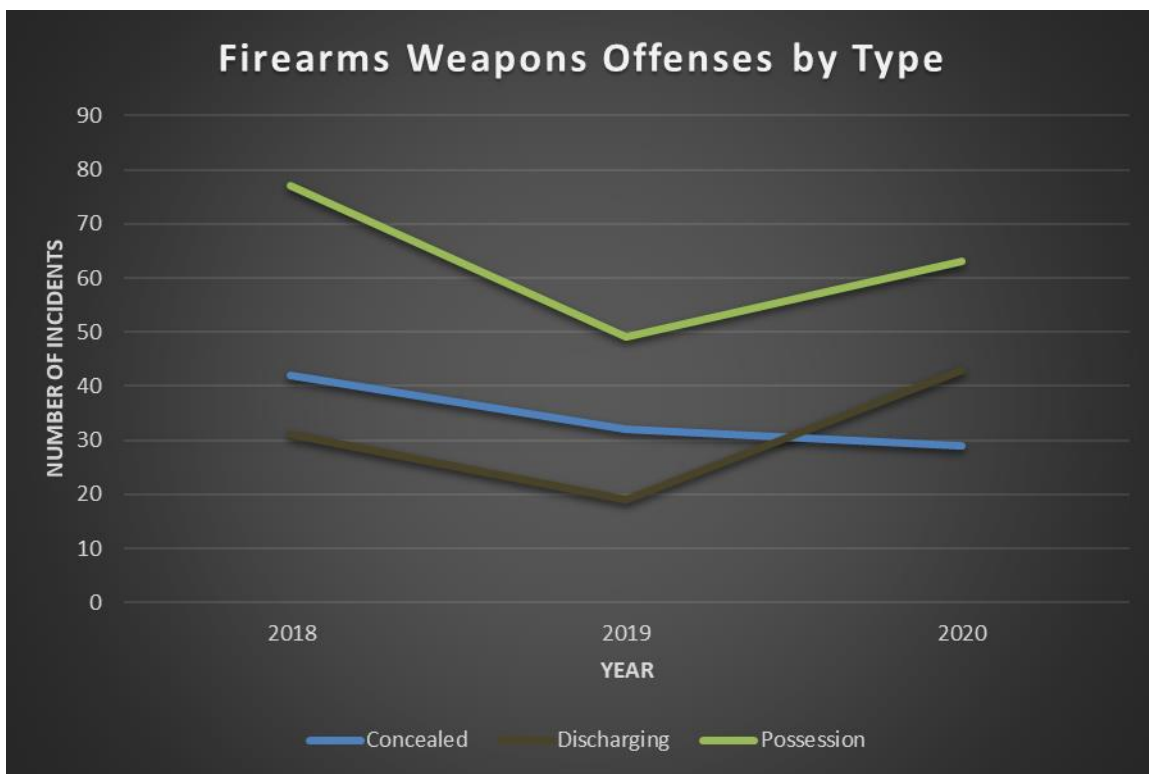
Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date

Overall, weapons offenses involving a firearm increased from 2019 – 2020. In fact, there has been a 35% increase in this category of incidents. The type of offenses driving this increase can be attributed to discharging of firearms and possession of firearms. It should be noted, however, that concealed firearms offenses have decreased since 2018.

When reviewing the data from 2018 – 2020, the 2018 calendar year had the highest number of weapons offenses involving a firearm. The following year – 2019 – showed a significant decrease in those incidents (-29%). Although the number of incidents in 2020 have not returned to the same levels as 2018, an upward trend does appear to be occurring.

Offense	2018	2019	2020
Concealed	42	32	29
Possession	77	49	63
Discharging	21	19	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>135</b>

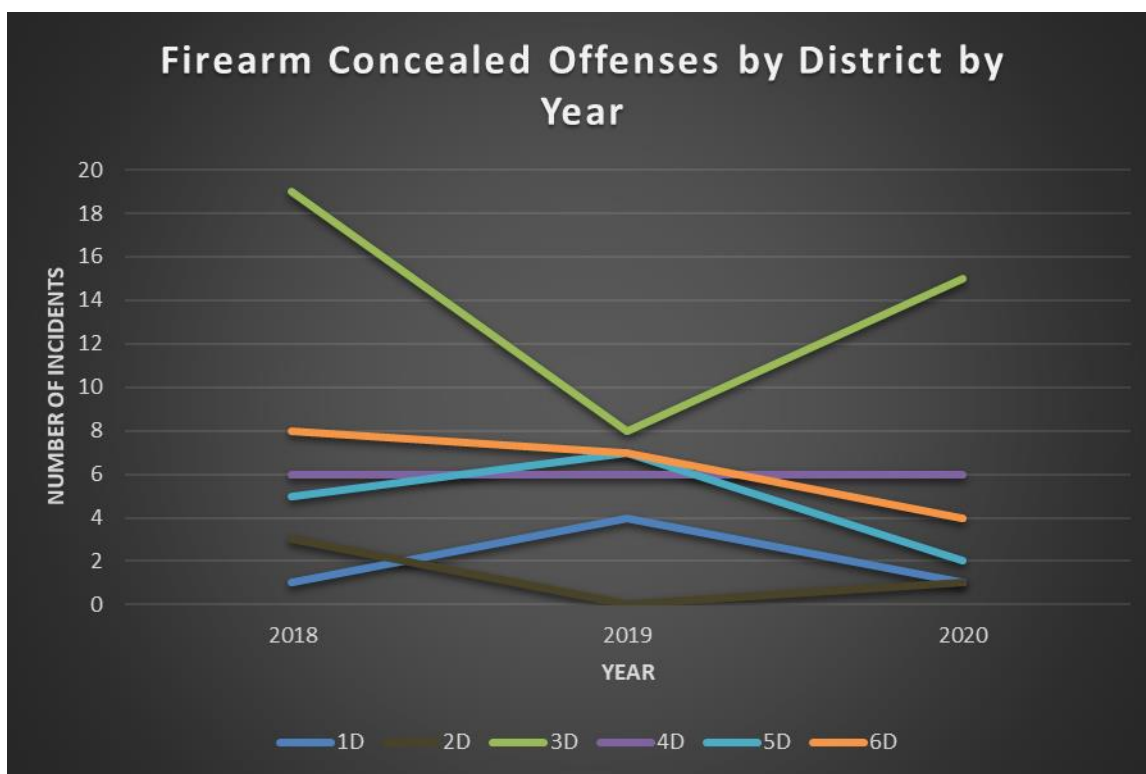


### Firearm Concealed Offenses

Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date

Weapons offenses in which a firearm was concealed have decreased from 2018 – 2020. This offense type decreased nearly 24% from 2018 – 2019. This downward trend continued from 2019 – 2020, with a smaller decrease of 9%. While this overall decrease is encouraging, the 3rd District has had the highest number of concealed firearms offenses for the three (3) year reporting timeframe.

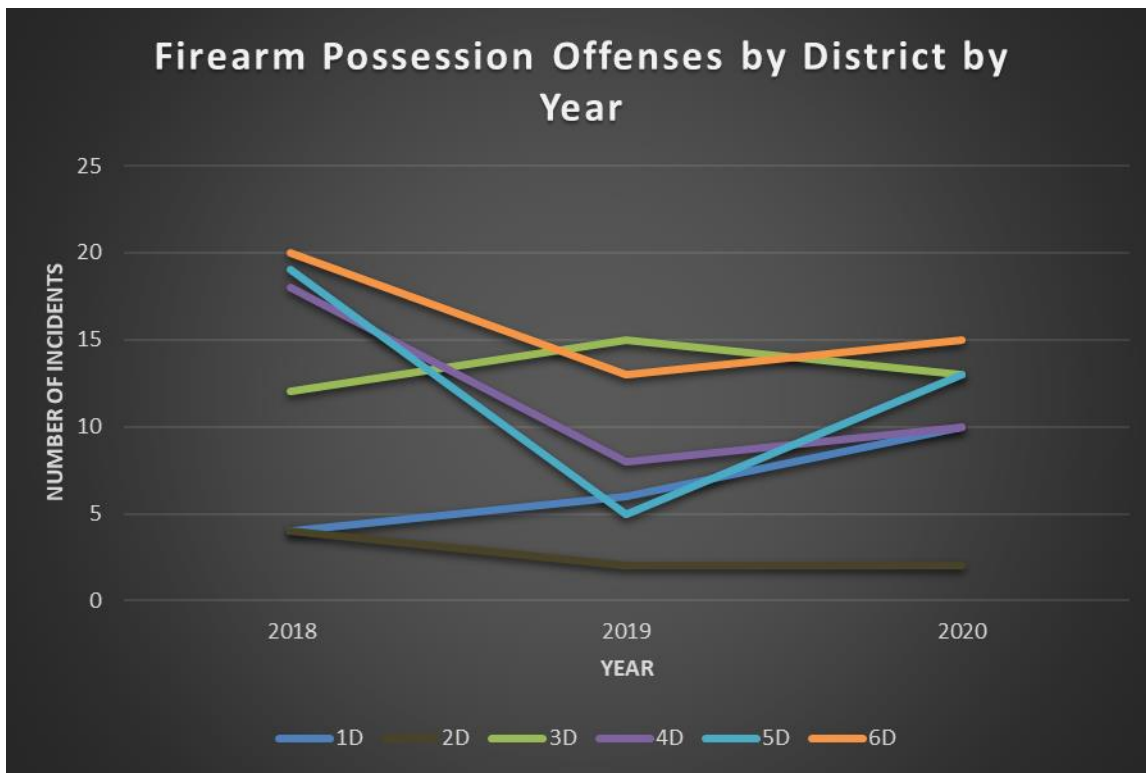


### Firearm Possession Offenses

Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date

Firearm possession offenses followed a similar trend as firearm discharging offenses. From 2018 – 2019, firearm possession offenses decreased by 36%. This type of offense then increased from 2019 – 2020 by nearly 29%. Since 2018, the 6th District has accounted for the highest, or second highest, number of firearm possession incidents per year in the County. In 2020, the 6th District accounts for the largest number of firearm possession incidents (15 incidents). The 5th District and the 3rd District are responsible for the second highest number of these incidents (13 incidents each).



## Non-Violent Crime

### Data:

- Compiled from WebFOCUS Dashboard
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on recorded EJustice start date
- All categories based on number of incidents, not number of victims
- Violent and non-violent crime types of note were selected at the discretion of the authors

### Filters:

- Takoma Park data is not included
- Unfounded reports and reports that were referred to another jurisdiction are not included
- Only includes incidents with a start date between January 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> in 2018, 2019 and 2020

Non-Violent Crime Type	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020
Auto Theft	628	636	823	1.3%	29.4%
Burglary - Commercial	232	259	338	11.6%	30.5%
Burglary - Residential	816	651	596	-20.2%	-8.4%
Damage Property	2195	2091	2230	-4.7%	6.6%
Fraud	2206	2288	2493	3.7%	9.0%
Larceny - From Auto/Auto Parts	3457	3667	4326	6.1%	18.0%
Larceny - All Other	3194	2999	2717	-6.1%	-9.4%
Larceny - Shoplifting	2089	2291	1608	9.7%	-29.8%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>14817</b>	<b>14882</b>	<b>15131</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

Even though the non-violent crime types shown below have increased overall between 2019 and 2020, that is largely due to significant increases in certain crime types and significant reductions in others.

Commercial burglaries, auto thefts and larcenies from auto and of auto parts saw significant increases (30.5%, 29.4% and 18.0% respectively). Again, the increases are likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With commercial establishments closed for extended periods of time, there is an increased opportunity for these establishments to be targeted for burglaries and less opportunities for the burglaries to be viewed and/or interdicted by witnesses. Conversely, shoplifting incidents have decreased since there are significantly fewer opportunities for this type of crime to occur.

Auto thefts and larcenies from autos and of auto parts have increased during the pandemic as well. Citizens are teleworking more and driving less due to stay-at-home orders, fewer operating retail establishments and personal choices to stay home. The results are that vehicles are being operated or accessed less, making them targets for thieves.

## **Drug-Related Arrests and Opioid Overdoses**

### **Drug-Related Arrests**

A significant decrease in traffic stops during the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the number of drug-related arrests, which oftentimes stem from traffic stops. There have been decreases in possession, distribution and other drug related offenses in 2020 YTD.

<b>Drug Crime Type</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>Annual Percent Change 2018 to 2019</b>	<b>Annual Percent Change 2019 to 2020</b>
Drug Possession	4306	3423	1588	-20.5%	-53.6%
Drug Distribution	398	343	164	-13.8%	-52.2%
Drug Offenses - Other	140	165	78	17.9%	-52.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4844</b>	<b>3931</b>	<b>1830</b>	<b>-18.8%</b>	<b>-53.4%</b>

### **Opioid Overdoses**

We are currently seeing an increase in both non-fatal and fatal overdoses YTD. The opioid crisis and COVID-19 pandemic are both public health crises that have direct impacts upon one another. The relationship between COVID-19 and the opioid crisis has been evident nationwide in some the following ways (as nationally identified by the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation, 2020):

- The health care system is overburdened by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis leading to a situation in which health care for persons suffering from addiction may be limited.
- Victims who are substance abusers may be more at risk for contracting COVID-19, and/or more at risk to the symptoms and medical complications of COVID-19 due to the affects that their addiction has on their overall health, specifically their respiratory system.
- Social distancing guidelines associated with COVID-19 may be creating barriers to successful substance abuse treatment.
- Stress associated with COVID-19 current restrictions impact daily life and financial hardships that contribute to an increased likelihood of substance abuse.

Overdoses YTD	2018	2019	2020	Annual Percent Change 2018-2019	Annual Percent Change 2019-2020
Fatal	42	52	60 (*7 pending)	24%	15%
Non-Fatal	117	102	132	-13%	29%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>25%</b>

*\*Some recent suspected fatal overdoses are pending final toxicology results*

## Domestic Violence Comparison

Data:

- Compiled from MCPD Internal EJustice database copy
- Based on recorded EJustice start date
- Based on approved reports in EJustice
- Based on report type in EJustice
  - Aggravated Assaults: 0413, 0414, 0415, 0423, 0424, 0425, 0433, 0434, 0435, 0443, 0444, 0445
  - Simple Assaults: 0813, 0814, 0815, 0823, 0824, 0824
  - Domestic abuse/neglect: 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016
  - Family Trouble: 2951
  - Homicides/Rapes – filtered on selected relationship code

Filters:

- Takoma Park data is not included

Reported incidents of domestic violence as defined above have lowered between 2018 and 2020. While totals for 2020 have dropped 6% as compared to 2019, there is concern that incidents of domestic violence are currently underreported. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a victim could flee a violent situation or access various domestic violence prevention resources. However, support systems that victims previously relied on such as extended family, religious groups and other community organizations may be much more difficult to access given the current social distancing climate.

