

The Star-Ledger

Crime in N.J.'s largest city continues to drop

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NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Dec. 28, 2019

The state's largest city will begin a new decade safer than it's been in years.

Murder, rape and other types of crime are down in Newark this year, according to data released Sunday. The city already hit a five-decade low last year, and Newark residents widely reported feeling safer.

Officials hailed the drop at a press conference earlier this month.

"We're moving in the right direction," Newark Mayor Ras Baraka said Dec. 19. "We're talking 20,000 less people that were victimized."

Crime dropped about 13% across multiple categories. There have been 51 murders in the city this year, according to police data, compared to 67 last year. There were 137 reported rapes, dozens fewer than the year before.

Auto theft dropped by a fifth, robbery is down 6% and aggravated assaults decreased by 3%.

The city's South Ward saw the largest drop in violence, according to Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose. However, he said more than a tenth of all violence happened in public housing, which included eight murders. Ambrose said the city was currently working with the Housing Authority to increase patrols.

Local officials were joined by state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito, Acting Essex County Prosecutor Theodore "Ted" Stephens II and others who praised how the department collaborated with other agencies. Stephens said their office had recently taken more than \$1 million in illegal drugs off the street.

Newark's police department continues to be overseen by a federal monitor, after a 2014 U.S. Department of Justice report found a pattern of unconstitutional policing.

"Violating people's constitutional rights did not translate into a reduction of crime," Baraka said. Since the reforms began, he said the city has also seen drops in citizen complaints and excessive force complaints, and he added that the city has paid less in settlements than in previous years.

The monitor's newest report, about the status of the city's data collection and officer morale, was released in October.