

**YOUR 401(k) PROBABLY TOOK A BEATING IN 2022**

A COMPLETE TURNAROUND IN 2023. BUSINESS, E-1



**STEELERS ADD FOUR TO HALL OF HONOR**

SPORTS, B-1



**Special election nominee**

Nonprofit executive Lindsay Powell is Democratic nominee to replace former state Rep. Sara Innamorato. **Local, C-1**



**PA. NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR**

Winner of the Keystone Media Award in 2020, 2022 and 2023 for top performing newsroom among Pennsylvania's largest news organizations



# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT NEWSPAPERS

\$5.00 236 YEARS OF SERVICE SUNDAY, JULY 30, 2023 VOL. 96, NO. 363, 7/30/23 FINAL



POST-GAZETTE SPECIAL REPORT

## CRIME STATS MASK DANGERS

Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette

Robert Fragasso spent years in his Downtown financial advising office with this view of Smithfield Street, but he said increasing crime prompted him to leave for the suburbs in April. His staff and the building doorman said they frequently witnessed drug exchanges and had to step over people sleeping on sidewalks near the building.

### Downtown, South Side remain epicenters of violence despite city's data, response

By Michael Korsh  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

**R**obert Fragasso remembers working in the Downtown of a half-century ago, when streetcars ran on the lanes now occupied by city buses and the city's iconic Point State Park was covered by railroad yards.

The CEO of Fragasso Financial Advisors said the area's explosive growth since then made him proud to be in Pittsburgh.

But in April, following months of dialogue with city officials, Mr. Fragasso made the difficult decision to pull his company out of its Downtown offices — a move that he said "rankles me to no end." The wave of violent crime in the Golden Triangle this year has struck an unavoidable fear into his clients and the people who work for him, he said.

"I've spent 51 years developing a

SEE **STATS**, PAGE A-4



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A fight breaks out near the Fragasso Financial Advisors building in the 600 block of Smithfield Street on May 23, prompting a response from Pittsburgh and Allegheny County police officers.

## PLCB's grip on liquor sales faces new round of resistance

Botched update of ordering system leads to more calls for wholesale privatization

By Hal B. Klein  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

On July 3, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board launched a new version of its licensee online order portal, a digital system that bars and restaurants use to place orders for wine and spirits.

The rollout of the system known as LOOP — already over budget and delivered about six months late — was riddled with bugs and confusing prompts, creating a three-week nightmare for Pennsylvania's hospitality industry and businesses trying to sell or buy alcohol.

"I'm guessing, but we'll probably do a third of the business we normally do this month. Every dime matters and every bottle we sell matters, but they don't seem to care much about that," says John D'Andrea, co-owner of D'Andrea Wines, founded by his father, Joseph, in Penn Hills in 1982.

Those in the industry also are unhappy about new fees built into the system that they say they didn't see coming and might be passed on to consumers.

While state officials defend improvements they say the new system will deliver, the disruption has many in the commercial wine and spirits world once again asking: Why does state government continue to be directly involved in wholesale alcohol sales at all?

### Questions and fees

The PLCB shut down ordering for a week at the end of June to swap in the new system, forcing bar and restaurant owners to stock up early for the extended July 4 weekend.

Then, just when businesses thought they could resume buying cases of wine and spirits, the system's limited functionality made it almost impossible to place orders, particularly for items in the special liquor order category.

Some vendors and importers had waited

SEE **PLCB**, PAGE A-8

## Ukrainians living here grateful for support they've received since fleeing war-torn nation

By Kristen Axtman  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Vasyl Urban had always dreamed of coming to the United States, believing "the roads were paved with gold."

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year, Mr. Urban, his wife, Mariiya Urban, and their three young kids fled their home in western Ukraine to Poland and then

on to the United States.

They left their house carrying two bags filled with clothes and personal belongings. They said goodbye to the tall, abundant garden in the yard. They hugged their parents farewell, not knowing when they would see them again.

The Urbans arrived in Carnegie in December through President Joe Biden's "Uniting for Ukraine" — a program that allows Ukrainians to

have temporary parole status if sponsored by a U.S. citizen who commits to supporting them financially.

Mr. Urban, sponsored by a family friend's connection, is one of millions of Ukrainians displaced as a result of the invasion of his country. The U.S. admitted at least 271,000 Ukrainians as of Feb. 24, one year

SEE **REFUGEES**, PAGE A-6



Lucy Schaly/Post-Gazette

Mariiya Urban and her daughter, Yuliana, Ukrainian refugees living in Carnegie, stand Wednesday in front of a friend's home where they are residing.

**post-gazette.com**  
Get the latest news and more online plus e-delivery of our daily newspaper at [my.post-gazette.com/activate](http://my.post-gazette.com/activate)

**Weather**  
Daytime high 78, tonight's low 56. **Page A-20**

Almanac ..... **A-2**  
Books ..... **D-5**  
Bridge ..... **G-8**  
Business ..... **E-1**  
Crosswords ..... **G-8**

Editorials ..... **D-2**  
Goodness ..... **F-1**  
Health ..... **H-1**  
Horoscope ..... **G-6**  
Insight ..... **D-1**

Jobs ..... **E-5**  
Lottery ..... **A-14**  
Mortgages ..... **G-6**  
Obituaries ..... **C-5**  
Real Estate ..... **G-4**

Sports ..... **B-1**  
State & Region ..... **C-1**  
Sunday Magazine ... **G-1**  
Television ..... **G-3**  
Traffic Watch ..... **C-2**



### ARDEN WOOD RANCH HOMES

LOWEST PRICED RANCH HOMES 2 MINUTES NORTH OF ZELIENOPLE FROM UPPER \$300s

**NEW PHASE OPEN IN AUGUST | JOIN THE LIST**



SCAN ME





# Downtown, South Side remain epicenters of violence despite city's data, response

**STATS**, FROM A-1

Downtown presence. And it was ruined in less than a year by wrong-headed policies on cleaning up the streets," Mr. Fragasso said.

The latest data from the city's Department of Public Safety shows major crimes — such as homicide, robbery and theft — have dropped by 4% across Pittsburgh in the first seven months of 2023, compared to the same period last year.

But recent spates of violence in some of the city's most vibrant areas have sowed continued mistrust among residents and business owners — including skepticism toward the city's own figures.

"You can say we're down 10%: Oh, well, don't break your arm patting yourself on the back," Mr. Fragasso said. "Take a walk down the street."

While the city's data shows an overall decline in crime — including homicides dropping by a third compared to the same time last year — Downtown and the South Side have remained epicenters of shootings and other violence so far this year, the Post-Gazette found.

More than a fifth of major crimes in the city through July — including almost a third of all robberies — took place in police Zone 2, which includes Downtown, and a quarter of homicides — mostly shootings — happened in Zone 3, which includes the South Side.

"There's an overwhelming amount of work that still needs to be done," said the Rev. Eileen Smith, executive director of the South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace, a group of volunteers and agencies focused on crime prevention. "I think things are about the same."

Rev. Smith said her staffers have increased their presence on the South Side, spending weekdays and Saturdays on 24-hour call to defuse incidents of violence and retaliation and "putting out more fires before they ignite."

## Pandemic-era spike lingers

Even with the city's overall numbers showing a slight downward trend, greater reductions in crime are still needed to offset a surge in violence that exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Starting in 2019, Pittsburgh saw the largest two-year rise in gun violence in at least a decade, with shootings and homicides across the city jumping by 49% and triggering pleas by residents for greater protections in neighborhoods such as Homewood.

Last year, the violence continued when homicides in the first six months reached a record high of 40.

The shootings prompted Mayor Ed Gainey to unveil a "Plan for Peace," a strategy to curb violence through an array of changes that included boosts in community policing and carrying out a study on the city's police staffing.

But the gun violence continued early this year in a pattern that raised serious concerns among crime prevention advocates.

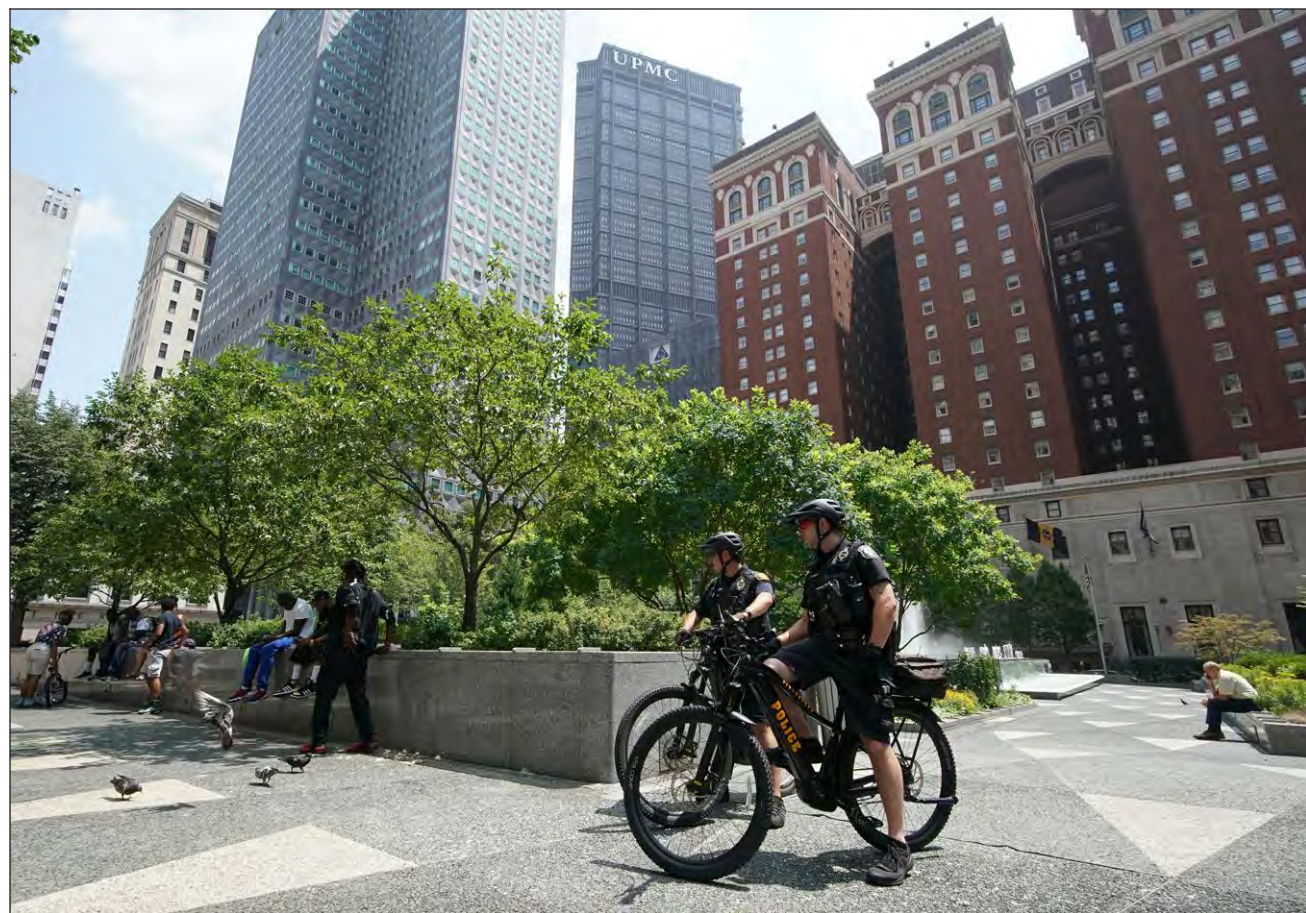
On Jan. 19, police found a man fatally shot in daylight on Liberty Avenue, across from the Wood Street T station.

Two days later, two people were found critically wounded on the South Side: one with injuries to the abdomen and face, and another victim — just blocks away — shot in the torso.

The next month, four teenage students were targeted by gunfire outside Westinghouse Academy in Homewood during afternoon dismissal. None of the injured students died, but the incident caused the school to move to remote learning for about a week.

The violence prompted Mayor Ed Gainey to commit to tripling the number of police officers Downtown, an area that once lagged behind other parts of the city in serious crime.

While the number of homicides and nonfatal shootings in the first half of the year has dropped to 95 from



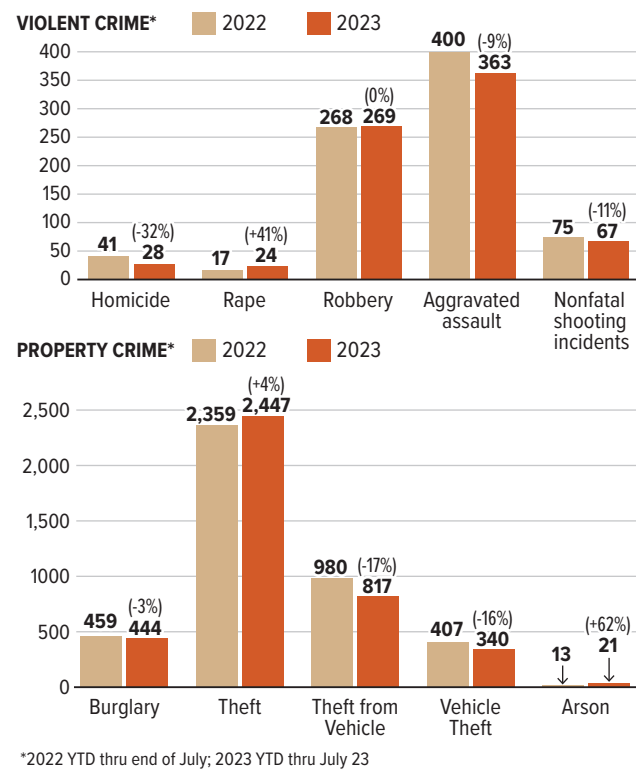
Pittsburgh bicycle police keep an eye on activity in Mellon Square on Wednesday. Amid growing safety concerns in the Golden Triangle, Mayor Ed Gainey in February pledged to triple the number of officers stationed Downtown. Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette photos



A blanket covers a person sleeping on the sidewalk in the 600 block of Smithfield Street on a hot day last week. Such scenes have prompted businesses to leave Downtown.

## City's reported crime figures

Data from the Department of Public Safety shows overall crime in the first six months of 2023 has dropped by 4% compared to the year prior, including declines in the number of homicides, aggravated assaults and vehicle thefts.



Source: City of Pittsburgh, Department of Public Safety. Research: Michael Korsh. Graphic: Ed Yozwick/Post-Gazette

114, advocates say the availability of guns remains one of the most critical problems in the most critical problems in the most critical problems hit by crime.

On a single day in June, four separate shootings, from the North Side to Homewood, left one person dead and four wounded. On another day in July, two shootings, one in the East Hills, the other in Brighton Heights, left a woman dead and two injured.

The following weekend, city police issued dozens of citations on the South Side — 57 in all — for offenses that included disorderly conduct and public drunkenness.

"I just don't see how the numbers are better. I see with my own eyes that it's just not getting better," said Brian Vetere, the owner of the Carson City Saloon, a popular bar on the South Side.

Earlier this month, Mr. Vetere announced the establishment would temporarily shut its doors. About 1 a.m.

July 9, ShotSpotter alerted city police that seven shots were fired just a block from the saloon.

Police discovered a man with a bullet wound to the shoulder. He died later at a hospital.

Mr. Vetere said he's participated in more than 50 meetings with local officials, including members of City Council and Mr. Gainey, but remains fearful about the lack of protection.

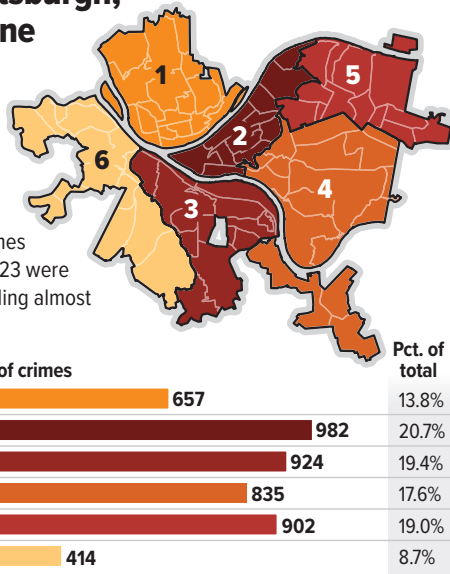
"They're just a lot of talk, but nothing ever gets done or improved. And this summer has been extremely bad, so we just decided to close the doors, because my staff is just terrified to be there," Mr. Vetere said.

Most recently, women's clothing boutique Peter Lawrence announced Tuesday it would close Sept. 30, with the owner citing the city's mounting homelessness and crime as detriments to his business.

Throughout the summer, a crew of workers vacated Fragasso Financial Advi-

## Crime in Pittsburgh, by police zone

The largest amount of crime is happening in Zone 2, where Downtown is located. More than a fifth (20.7%) of crimes in the first half of 2023 were in this zone — including almost a third of robberies.

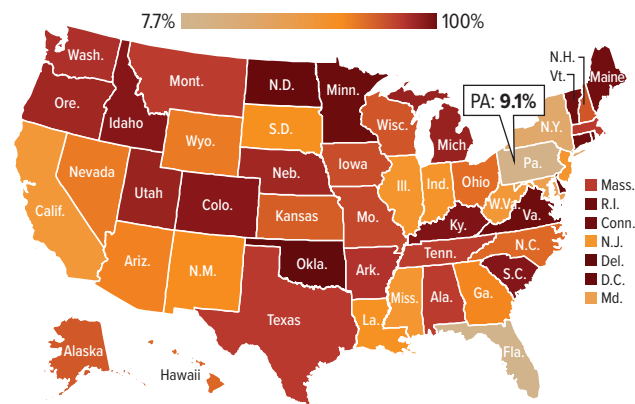


Source: City of Pittsburgh, Department of Public Safety. Research: Michael Korsh. Graphic: Ed Yozwick/Post-Gazette

## Gaps in crime reporting, by state

In 2021, the FBI upgraded its crime databases to a more robust infrastructure, but thousands of police agencies across the country failed to update their own systems in time. Pennsylvania has the second-lowest participation rate in the new system, with just 9% of law enforcement agencies submitting their crime statistics for 2022.

### SHARE OF AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN CRIME DATA



Source: The Marshall Project, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Research: Michael Korsh. Graphic: Ed Yozwick/Post-Gazette

sors' headquarters on Smithfield Street and relocated the office to the suburbs — a time-consuming and expensive process, said Mr. Fragasso.

"I think the city should be transparent as to what it's seeing. They should be transparent — not alarmist, but transparent. They should be equally transparent about the plan they are formulating and the steps they are taking," he said.

A spokesperson for the mayor's office declined to comment on the Post-Gazette's findings, or to answer questions about police plans to target some of the most troubled neighborhoods.

Zone 5, the patrol area that includes Homewood and East Hills, experienced nearly a third of all the killings in the city so far this year and a quarter of all aggravated assaults.

Previous Post-Gazette reports have found this area — which has historically struggled with shootings — to be a focal point of Pittsburgh's gun violence in recent years.

After a 31-year-old man was shot to death on Frankstown Avenue in Homewood last year, Mr. Gainey and a dozen other city officials returned to the street weeks later to announce the "All In Homewood

Initiative," a campaign that included a neighborhood cleanup and increased intervention staffers.

Longtime Homewood resident Nekeisha Carter, 46, said the efforts were launched to curb the shootings, "but I don't know how effective that will be."

"You can't deal with violence if you don't have a real understanding of the full context of what happens in the Black community with violence," she said.

## Public perception of crime is powerful

Jon Hurwitz, a longtime political science professor at the University of Pittsburgh, said that across history, the public's perceptions of crime have shaped their support of harsher policies, from law enforcement crackdowns to mandatory sentencing laws.

"Unlike many policy areas where the public impact is almost impossible to perceive, in the area of crime, attitudes of the public make an enormous difference," said Mr. Hurwitz, who retired in 2016.

The enduring uncertainties about the state of crime are being echoed across the country, as crime data from more than 90% of Pennsyl-

vania's law enforcement agencies remains unreported to the FBI, a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette analysis found.

Since 1930, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting system has been a critical tool to gather figures about crime nationwide and guide law enforcement's budgeting, resource allocation and evaluation of police performance.

But in 2021, when the FBI upgraded its databases to a more robust reporting system known as NIBRS, thousands of police agencies nationwide failed to update their own systems in time, creating gaps that left the true state of crime in the U.S. virtually unknown, according to experts.

"We're sort of stuck in this limbo, where we know that things have changed, but we don't have solid data. And it makes it really hard to talk responsibly about crime and public safety," said Ames Grawert, a senior counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

A July report from the Council on Criminal Justice that measured crime trends in 37 cities, including Pittsburgh, found that homicides had dropped by 9.4% compared to the first half of last year.

That said, researchers also found that homicide levels remained 24% higher in the first half of this year than in 2019, a year prior to massive upheavals — including the pandemic, the police killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests.

In Pennsylvania, just 126 out of almost 1,400 police departments have made the proper upgrades to turn over their crime numbers to the FBI, according to data obtained by The Marshall Project, a journalism nonprofit that reports on criminal justice.

The vast majority of police departments — including Pittsburgh's — have remained missing from the FBI's data, leaving crime in areas representing more than half of the state's population unaccounted for.

Getting those kinds of numbers "inspires trust, helps people understand their world and believe what the government is telling them about important things like crime," said Mr. Grawert of the Brennan Center.

Pointing to cities such as Philadelphia and New York — which have portals that display crime data by the minute — he said the lack of national crime figures underscored the need for local officials to be transparent when it comes to crime.

The city of Pittsburgh used to display an interactive violence dashboard, which consistently provided detailed breakdowns of crime in certain neighborhoods, but the display has been taken down for maintenance "until further notice."

Cara Cruz, a spokeswoman for the city's Department of Public Safety, said the crime feature had been "very much out of date" and "was not an accurate reflection of the numbers."

She said Pittsburgh police also plan to implement a new records management system, which will meet the FBI's standards, in August.

Rev. Smith of the South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace said collaborating with city officials is critical in the fight against crime.

County grants, such as the Allegheny County Community Violence Reduction Initiative, have enabled the Coalition for Peace to bolster its staff and create new outreach programs for violence prevention.

"We all are in this together. We need to stop so much criticism of each other and work together to try to end this pandemic of gun violence," she said.

While Fragasso Financial Advisors continues to pivot its staff and clients to its suburban offices, its founder holds out hope that the Golden Triangle can return to its former glory.

"Downtown Pittsburgh matters to everybody," he said.

Michael Korsh: mkorsh@post-gazette.com; @michael\_korsh