

Testimony on "Gangs and Crime in Latin America".

**Detective First Class Kelly L. Smith, Howard County
(MD) Department of Police**

**Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on
the Western Hemisphere**

April 20, 2005

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OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of our County Executive James Robey, Chief of Police G. Wayne Livesay, and the members of the Howard County Police Department; Thank you for this opportunity to discuss gangs and crime and their effect on local law enforcement and to the quality of life of the citizens we are charged to protect.

HOWARD COUNTY OVERVIEW

Howard County is located on the I-95 Corridor between Washington D.C. and Baltimore. Howard County has been one of Maryland’s fastest-growing regions, increasing it’s population by 34% over the past decade. Currently, the county’s citizens are among the wealthiest in Maryland, with the highest per capita income in the state.

During the past decade, we have seen a corresponding increase in our hispanic population. According to U.S. Census figures, the Hispanic population in Howard County increased by 102% from 1990 to 2000. The 2000 Census indicated that about 3% (7,490) of our total population was Hispanic. A majority of our Hispanic Community are originally from the countries of Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guetemala and Panama).

Population (2003 est.): 268,563

Size: 251 square miles

Howard County is situated in the heart of the dynamic corridor between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, which, combined, comprise the fourth largest consolidated market in the United States. Howard County’s ideal geographic location has resulted in the substantial growth of a wide variety of industries, including high-tech and life science businesses. Conveniently accessible to I-95 and I-70, the county is located within a 20-minute drive of Baltimore/Washington International Airport and the Port of Baltimore.

Residents enjoy quality living in settings that range from historic old towns to progressive planned communities. The Howard County Government, Educational, Recreational and cultural programs have all been nationally recognized for their excellence.

Howard County has been one of Maryland's fastest-growing regions, increasing its population by 34% over the past decade. Howard County's population is projected to grow to 321,050 by 2030, according to the Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning. Currently, the county's citizens are among the wealthiest in Maryland: with a median household income of \$82,900, Howard County tops the state

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A diverse business base thrives in the county, taking advantage of a friendly business climate, a highly educated workforce and superb quality of life. Howard County’s corporate citizens range from high technology, telecommunications and biotechnology companies to multinational corporations, research and development firms and wholesale distributors.

Howard County’s 7,610 businesses employ 119,600 workers; over 250 of these businesses have 100 or more workers. Major private sector employers include The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, W.R. Grace, Giant Food, Verizon, MICROS Systems and Arbitron.

HISPANIC OR LATINO POPULATION IN HOWARD COUNTY*

| | <u>Total</u> | <u>Percentage of Population</u> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Total population | 247,842 | 100.0 |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | 7,490 | 3.0 |
| Mexican | 1,981 | 0.8 |
| Puerto Rican | 1,388 | 0.6 |
| Cuban | 399 | 0.2 |
| Other Hispanic or Latino | 3,722 | 1.5 |
| Not Hispanic or Latino | 240,352 | 97.0 |
| White alone | 180,010 | 72.6 |

* Figures from US Census Bureau

The Hispanic population, which can be of any race, more than doubled from 3,699 residents in 1990 to 7,490 residents in 2000. Total Hispanic Population increased by 102%

TIMELINE MARA SALVATRUCHA (MS-13) GANG IN HOWARD COUNTY

As we have seen with many other immigrant communities, a small element of the population turns to criminal activity. Often they start out by preying on members of their own community. Much of this crime goes unreported. In the case of the Hispanic Community we have seen an increased presence of a gang known as Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13. We first began hearing about MS-13 around 1999 at area gang information sharing meetings. By 2000, we knew that MS-13 were prevalent in Northern Virginia and also in our bordering counties of Montgomery and Prince George’s. In 2001, our first known MS-13 member was arrested in Howard County.

The following year (2002) we began arresting multiple MS-13 members that we committing crimes within Howard County. In 2003, we handled our first graffiti case involving Mara Salvatrucha and the number of reports and arrests continued to increase. By 2004, we were investigating MS-13 members for major crimes including rape, robbery and assault.

During the past four years we have documented 57 incidents and identified 55 MS-13 members that have either been arrested or involved in criminal activity within Howard

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County. We have also seen an increase in the number of MS-13 members living within our community.

Timeline of MS-13 in Howard County:

- 1999 First regional reports involving MS-13 members and activity
- 2000 Continued regional tracking of MS-13 at Mid Atlantic Regional Gang Information Network (MARGIN) information sharing meetings
- 2001 First Howard County arrest of MS-13 member (Historical Documentation)
- 2002 Multiple Howard County arrest of MS-13 members (Historical Documentation)
First investigation of MS-13 crimes being committed in Howard County
Reassignment of Intelligence Section to the Operations Bureau
- 2003 Graffiti at Savage Rapids, Savage, Howard County
Increase in reported MS-13 cases in Howard County
Multiple arrests of MS-13 members in Howard County (Real Time Documentation)
- 2004 Continued increase in MS-13 related cases in Howard County
Multiple arrest of MS-13 members in Howard County (Real Time Documentation)
Entry Level and In Service Training Provided to HCPD members
RODRIGUEZ/ TAYLOR investigations (see Spotlight)
Assigned Investigator to Regional Area Gang Enforcement (RAGE) Task Force
US 1 Center stabbing
- 2005 MS-13 activity and graffiti has been documented in Savage, Elkrigde, West Columbia, East Columbia, and Ellicott City

DOCUMENTED ACTIVITIES IN HOWARD COUNTY

1. 2001 November: MS-13 member from Washington D.C. arrested on Howard County Failure to appear- theft warrant
2. 2002 March: MS-13 member from Montgomery County, MD charged in Howard County robbery investigation
3. 2002 April: MS-13 member with Howard County address identified by Fairfax PD Gang Unit at MS-13 gang meeting in Loudin County, VA on Easter Sunday

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4. 2002 August: MS-13 Sailors Locos Salvatrucha Westside (SLSW) member from Prince George’s County MD arrested at Savage Rapids, Savage, Howard County on Controlled dangerous substance violation.
5. 2002 September: MS-13 members from Arlington, VA suspected in armed robbery investigation North Laurel, Howard County, Maryland.
6. 2003 May: MS-13 Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) gang members commit destruction of property at the Savage Rapids, Savage, Howard County.
7. 2003 May: Possible MS-13 involvement in homicide in the Columbia, Howard County area.
8. 2003 July: MS-13 Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) member suspected in rape investigation
9. 2003 August: MS-13 member who resides in Howard County is incarcerated in Montgomery County, MD Detention Center
10. 2003 August: Hispanic gang activity in the Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County area.
11. 2003 August: Hispanic gang activity and paraphernalia at U.S. Route 1 Flea Market, Elkridge, Howard County.
12. 2003 August: MS-13 member incarcerated in Montgomery County (MD) Detention Center receives visitors from Howard County relatives and associates.
13. 2003 August: MS-13 Centrales Locos Salvatrucha (CLS) members residing in Long Reach, Columbia, Howard County identified and found to be associating with gang members in Northern Virginia
14. 2003 September: MS-13 Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) member from Prince George’s County, MD arrested for multiple automobile thefts in the Elkridge, Howard County area.
15. 2003 September: Suspects in a homicide investigation that occurred in Columbia, Howard County are arrested at known MS-13 safehouse in Long Island NY
16. 2003 September: MS-13 Teclas Salvatrucha (TLS) member is residing in Ellicott City, Howard County. The subject is known to also have frequent associations with Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) and Sailors Locos Salvatrucha Westside (SLSW) members.

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17. 2003 September: Reports of Prostitution and bordellas operating in the Stevens Forest and Long Reach areas of Columbia, Howard County. MS-13 members alleged to be providing security and protection at these locations.
18. 2003 September: Subject claiming MS-13 affiliation in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County.
19. 2003 October: MS-13 Sailors Locos Salvatrucha Westside (SLSW) graffiti located at a State Park near the Baltimore/Howard County Line –Woodbine, Howard County
20. 2003 October: Suspected MS-13 activity at Soccer Games in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County
21. 2003 November: Field Interview Report of suspected MS-13 members in Elkridge, Howard County.
22. 2003 December: Increased reporting of MS-13 in Long Reach, Columbia, Howard County. Multiple subjects identified in the area having ties to Charlotte-Mecklenburgh NC (The Charlotte-Mecklenburgh area was in the midst of a major gang crackdown at the time)
23. 2004 January: MS-13 member identified living in Elkridge, Howard County
24. 2004 March: Field Interview Report regarding possible MS-13 members at Columbia Mall, Columbia, Howard County. Several of the subjects identified also had ties to Miami FL.
25. 2004 March: Carjacking, Robbery, Auto Theft with MS-13 connections from Savage, Howard County.
26. 2004 March: Field Interview Report of suspected MS-13 member in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County.
27. 2004 March: Assault/ stabbing at restaurant in Ellicott City, Howard County in which MS-13 members are suspects.
28. 2004 March: Theft from Vehicle arrest of several MS-13 Teclas Salvatrucha (TLS) and Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) members from Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties in Elkridge, Howard County.
29. 2004 May: MS-13 Sailors Locos Salvatrucha Westside (SLSW) Clique leader identified working in Howard County

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30. 2004 May: MS-13 member of Langley Park Salvatruchas (LPS) suspect in attempted breaking and entering investigation. Columbia, Howard County
31. 2004 June: Arrest of Hispanic Gang member on Motor Vehicle Violation. Jessup, Howard County
32. 2004 July: MS-13 members observed in vehicle on U.S. 40, Ellicott City, Howard County.
33. 2004 July: MS-13 gang members residing in Howard County involved in motor vehicle pursuit and arrested on auto theft charges. Ellicott City, Howard County
34. 2004 July: MS-13 member arrested in area of Prince George’s County Maryland for Concealed Deadly Weapon Violation Howard County resident
35. 2004 July: MS-13 member Teclas Salvatrucha (TLS) arrested by RAGE Task Force in Langley Park, MD on Howard County failure to appear warrant-theft warrant
36. 2004 July: Domestic Assault arrest of suspected MS-13 member on Basket Ring Rd Columbia, Howard County.
37. 2004 July: MS-13 members documented at disorderly conduct call. West Springs Drive, Ellicott City, Howard County
38. 2004 August: MS-13 member from Prince George’s County arrested on driving while intoxicated charges. Laurel, Howard County.
39. 2004 August: Two MS-13 members arrested on concealed deadly weapon charges. Town and Country, Ellicott City, Howard County.
40. 2004 August: MS-13 related gang activity reported at Restaurant in Harpers Choice Columbia, Howard County
41. 2004 August: Known MS-13 members observed at MEGA FEST 2004 at Merriweather Post Pavilion.
42. 2004 August: Field Interview Report from traffic stop on suspected MS-13 member. Jessup, Howard County
43. 2003 September: Several MS-13 Teclas Salvatrucha (TLS) members from Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties, arrested on theft charges from Columbia Mall, Columbia, Howard County.

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44. 2004 September: Field Interview Report regarding traffic contact of MS-13 member with ties to Baltimore County and Fairfax Virginia. Ellicott City, Howard County.
45. 2004 September: MS-13 and rival gang graffiti in the Town and Country area of Ellicott City, Howard County.
46. 2004 October: MS-13 member arrested on failure to appear/ theft warrant from Anne Arundel County. Ellicott City, Maryland.
47. 2004 October: Field Interview Report of MS-13 member Town & Country Ln, Ellicott City, Howard County.
48. 2004 October: Investigation into MS-13 activity at restaurant/nightclub in Ellicott City, Howard County.
49. 2004 October: Investigation of MS-13 regarding theft from vehicle, destruction of property in Elkridge, Howard County.
50. 2004 October: MS-13 associate with ties to North Carolina and New York identified in Columbia, Howard County
51. 2004 November: Assault/ stabbing investigation at U.S. 1 Center. Gang fight involving MS-13 and Brown Pride Locos. Elkridge, Howard County.
52. 2004 November: MS-13 member in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County.
53. 2004 December: MS-13 member identified in Long Reach, Columbia, Howard County.
54. 2004 December: Disorderly conduct at U.S. 1 Center involving MS-13 member from Baltimore County
55. 2004 December: MS-13 member identified in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County.
56. 2005 January: MS-13 Members arrested in Oakland Mills, Columbia, Howard County.
57. 2005 February: MS-13 and rival SUR13 gang graffiti in Wilde Lake, Columbia, Howard County.

IDENTIFIED MEMBERS IN HOWARD COUNTY

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The Howard County Police Department maintains several databases pertaining to gang activity within the region. A check of available records revealed the following information pertaining to Mara Salvatrucha:

- **1200** individuals entered in our database, comprised of information from several jurisdictions.
- **128** Arrest Reports with suspects indicating Central American birth locations.
- **55** confirmed MS members arrested or engaged in criminal activity within Howard County
- **21** Subjects with Howard County addresses and ties to MS-13
- **8** Confirmed MS Members with Howard County addresses

CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

During this time period, MS-13 members have been found to commit Homicide, Rape, Assault, Robbery, Theft, Vehicle Theft, Prostitution, Extortion, and Destruction of Property.

One area that is sufficiently active, and provides sufficient data to analyze, is the area of auto theft.

Honda Civic/Acura Integra Theft Analysis

The chart below illustrates a significant increase in thefts of both Honda Civics and Acura Integras. It appears the shift in the thefts began in October of 2001. This trend was preceded by the release of The Fast and The Furious movie released on June 22, 2001. The movie prominently features small import cars with aftermarket parts being street raced and used in criminal activity. A second movie, 2 Fast and 2 Furious, was released on June 6 of 2003.

Most of the thefts locally have involved popping ignitions and removing aftermarket tires, rims, stereos, taillights, body parts and other parts. Model years range between early 90's through 2000. Only five vehicles with model years 2001 and later have been taken and two of those were from dealerships where keys were available. This may be due to the anti-theft key/ignition systems and the fact that many of the cars being stolen belong to juveniles who can't afford newer models.

In the few instances of Lo-Jack equipped vehicles being stolen it appears that they were discarded quickly. This may be due to the nature of the activity or that the thieves may possibly have some way of detecting the Lo-Jack signal.

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The time of day of the thefts principally depends on the type of location. Vehicles taken from the Park & Rides and the Community College tend to be taken during daytime hours. Vehicles taken from residential neighborhoods generally tend to disappear overnight.

| | Civics | Integras | Total | All Auto Thefts | % of Total Auto Thefts | Recovered Stripped | PG Recoveries |
|-------------|--------|----------|-------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1999 | 16 | 5 | 21 | 702 | 3.0% | 1 | 2 |
| 2000 | 14 | 6 | 20 | 477 | 4.2% | 6 | 5 |
| 2001 | 17 | 7 | 24 | 582 | 4.1% | 6 | 5 |
| 2002 | 38 | 15 | 53 | 611 | 8.7% | 17 | 21 |
| 2003 | 63 | 31 | 94 | 680 | 13.8% | 49 | 35 |
| 2004 | 52 | 17 | 69 | 613 | 11.2% | 27 | 16 |

The totals in the chart above include attempted thefts. Attempted theft is counted as a vehicle theft for UCR statistical data purposes.

As noted above, the majority of the actual stolen vehicles have been recovered in Prince Georges County, although a smaller number were recovered in Montgomery County, the District of Columbia and Virginia.

A few Civics and Integras stolen from other jurisdictions were recovered in Howard County and resulted in the shut down of a chop shop and arrest of four subjects.

KNOWN CLIQUES IN HOWARD COUNTY

Presently, no cliques (subgroups) have claimed Howard County as their turf. As stated before, we have identified members from several local cliques, especially from the areas of Northern Virginia, Prince George’s County (Maryland) and Montgomery County (Maryland). Our investigations have also led us to El Salvador, Honduras, Long Island (New York), Charlotte (North Carolina), and Los Angeles (California).

Known MS-13 cliques identified in Howard County:

SLSW- Sailors Locos Salvatrucha Westside

LPS- Langley Park Salvatrucha

TLS- Teclas Salvatrucha

CEN- Centrales Locos Salvatrucha

LLS- Leeward Lokotes Salvatrucha

RIVAL GANG ACTIVITY DOCUMENTED IN HOWARD COUNTY

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In addition to the emergence of MS-13 in our region, we have also noted an increase in activity and contact with several other street gangs known to be rivals of MS-13.

MS-13 rival gangs identified in Howard County:

SUR-13/ Sureno

18th Street

Vatos Locos

Brown Pride Locos

Bloods

El Palo

OPERATIONAL ACTIONS TAKEN

In response to the increased threat, we have taken several steps to improve our ability to meet this challenge. We are an active member and participant in the Mid Atlantic Regional Gang Information Network (MARGIN). MARGIN is a network of gang investigators, primarily from Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C. and Delaware. Its members meet on a regular basis to share information and intelligence concerning gangs. We have assigned an investigator to the ATF sponsored RAGE Task Force. Our participation in the RAGE Task Force allows us to assist our fellow agencies in the fight to control gang activity and also allows us to gain improved intelligence and experience in the interdiction and investigation of gang matters. We have also increased the amount of training given to our sworn officers at both the entry level and thru inservice training. We disseminate a weekly intelligence bulletin that contains the most current gang information on a weekly basis. We have extended our training to other county government employees, school personnel, and citizen and community groups.

SPOTLIGHT INVESTIGATIONS

Our efforts to control and eradicate gang violence are a work in progress. In order to explain the increasing complexity of this issue and to show just how extensive, pervasive, and sophisticated the MS-13 members that we have encountered are; I offer the following two case studies:

Jorge Arturo RODRIGUEZ

- During 2004, Howard County Police continued an investigation into a rape of a 11 year-old girl.
- During the investigation, the suspect, who was known to the victim, was identified as a member of MS 13, who has lived in Prince George’s County
- Information from several sources indicated that the rape suspect was also a suspect in a homicide of a local police officer in his native Country of Honduras.
- Original information indicated that the suspect had fled the United States back to Honduras.

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- During the summer of 2004, the suspect was located and arrested in Prince George’s County Maryland, by members of the RAGE Task Force
- The suspect admitted to killing the police officer in Honduras.
- The suspect was already awaiting a hearing in California regarding a prior immigration violation, as he had entered the United States illegally.
- Howard County notified I.C.E, as well as Interpol to resolve the extradition process in this case. This required:
 - Obtaining a copy of the homicide warrant from the Supreme Court of Honduras
 - Coordinating information sharing with I.C.E.
 - Ensuring that a detainer was filed to hold the suspect
 - Ensuring that each subsequent jurisdiction to have custody of the suspect because of his charges in multiple jurisdictions, were aware of his immigration status.
- The suspect was to have been deported in Late April or Early May of 2005.

Israel RAMOS-CRUZ

- During 2003, Maryland State Forest and Park Service Police contacted Howard County Police regarding MS-13 Graffiti on the bridge at the Howard-Baltimore County border.
- During 2004, we learned that a high-ranking member of the SLSW Clique (Israel Ramos-Cruz) was working in Howard County, at a job site near the graffiti location.
- In addition, it was learned that members of MS-13 were utilizing the area to socialize, and to conduct target practice with their firearms.
- Investigators at a residence in Long Island New York located a photograph during an investigation, which depicted several suspects painting graffiti on a bridge overpass.
- Through information sharing among the agencies, one of the suspects was identified as Ramos-Cruz.

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- As RAGE Team members were preparing their case against Ramos-Cruz, the received information that members of SLSW were planning to order a “green light” (order to assassinate) on an investigator with the RAGE Task Force
- RAGE Team members conducted a search and seizure warrant at the suspect’s residence in Montgomery County, MD., and recovered a handgun stolen from North Carolina, as well as other gang indicators, and photographs of the suspect in his native country of El Salvador, wearing his military uniform.
- The suspect was subsequently scheduled for deportation because he was in the country illegally.

CLOSING REMARKS

From a local perspective, the emergence of organized street gangs like MS-13 is one of the most important issues that we have faced in the last decade. Their prevalence, fluidity, and sophistication have forced us to change how we organize and train our members to safeguard the community. Because MS-13 is so expansive and so many of its members are illegal immigrants, we have been required to work with allied law enforcement agencies on local, state, federal, and even international level. We have found that as local jurisdictions have organized to displace MS-13, they frequently migrate to new communities that are not familiar with the threat that they pose. Fortunately, members of the Law Enforcement Community are coming together to battle this issue. On a national level, it also appears that people are beginning to give MS-13 the kind of serious attention that a gang of their history of violence and savagery deserve.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today and I would be happy to address your questions.