

Statement by Mayor Bill Cole, November 2, 2023

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest sympathy to the family members and friends of the victims who died as a result of these recent shootings in our city.

In just five short days, three people, including an innocent, one-year-old infant, lost their lives as a result of heartless criminal behavior and senseless gun violence.

My heart also goes out to the neighbors neighborhoods where these shootings, and the non-fatal shooting on Colton Blvd., occurred, as well as to all our residents who, as a result of these crimes, feel less safe in their homes, neighborhoods, and our community.

I, like all of us, condemn these acts of senseless violence and insist that those responsible be held accountable for their brazen actions.

Violent crime will not be tolerated, and violence is never the answer to conflict.

I'm confident that I speak for all city council members, many of whom I have spoken with in recent days, when I say that we cannot, and will not, let these killings define our community.

We are committed to doing everything we can to make Billings a safe community.

Ironically, these tragic and heart-wrenching deaths come in a year when we have seen a significant decline in violent crime.

According to Chief St. John's August 21, 2023 semi-annual report to the city council, violent crime in the first half of this year was down significantly from the first half of 2022 and down 18.3% from the peak in 2021.

And before Saturday, homicides stood at 6, well below the 17 in 2022 and below the two previous years as well.

But those statistics don't mean anything to the victims of violent crime or their families.

I want to express our community's and the city council's appreciation for the men and women of law enforcement who have worked to protect our community and solve these crimes with diligence and professionalism.

Thank you also to the Billings Fire Department, AMR, Sheriff Linder, and the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office who played important roles in responding to several of these crimes and their victims.

I have full confidence in Chief St. John, the Billings Police Department, County Attorney Twito, and our Yellowstone County prosecutors to investigate these crimes and bring those who are responsible to justice.

The BPD and their partners have an outstanding track record when it comes to solving serious, high-profile crimes in Billings.

I also encourage law enforcement and our entire community to come up with proactive strategies that will reduce the likelihood of similar criminal activity in the future.

These investigations require a tremendous investment of human resources and can take a severe physical and emotional toll on the law enforcement officers, paramedics, and other first responders who are involved, as well as on their families.

I hope our community will remain as patient as possible while these investigations are carried out and will stand by the victims' families, our first responders, and our community in prayer and compassion.

Finally, I encourage us all to commit ourselves anew to doing what we can as parents, guardians, friends, and families to address the root causes of crime and be a positive influence in the lives of at-risk youth.

Know where your children are and who they are hanging out with. Model love, compassion, and accountability. Get involved as a coach; be a big brother or big sister; or volunteer at your school or church youth group.

And if you know something is amiss, alert the appropriate authorities. Don't look away. Act before another innocent life is taken, and before more hearts are broken.

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