Consolidation, Coordination Needed In Police Agencies

Lafayette must have more effective law enforcement. The time has come when Lafayette’s police agencies can no longer function much the same as when we were a small city of 40,000 people.

With our metropolitan status has come increased big city, professional crime.

Last year alone:
- Two men fled with more than $25,000 from a local bank after a daytime robbery.
- Police are still seeking another man who fled after another bank robbery.
- More than $50,000 in jewelry was taken in a daytime armed robbery in a busy shopping center.
- Armed bandits escaped with the day’s receipts from a local department store after another daylight stickup.
- A woman was murdered in a downtown apartment building.
- Armed robberies became a matter of routine.

The burglary rate soared to “alarming” proportions, according to a report by the chief of police.

Evidence continued to grow of dope traffic, not only in marijuana but in harder drugs. The problem was found in our elementary schools.

A crime in every category showed an increase.

Can anything be done about such a dangerous situation that poses a constant threat to our lives and property?

Our police agencies are undermanned, undertrained, and underequipped. Neither the police nor sheriff’s office has enough funds to provide adequate salaries for the training and maintenance of their forces. Despite such a money shortage, there is some belief that the city alone should have at least a 150-man police force. This could well be true, but before endorsing the idea of more police in uniform, our law enforcement agencies could take a hard look at what might be the immediate answer to the present crime situation.

Simply, it is a matter of coordination—cooperation between the agencies. Specifically, the city police and sheriff’s office could pool their talents, along with the state police, security officers at USL, and the Oil Center. As an example, why not the formation of what might be called a “Drug Squad” where in each law enforcement agency in Lafayette would place its best narcotics-trained officers in one division working together as a unit. This coordination would eliminate the duplicated effort we now have.

The time, money and energy saved plus the effectiveness of such a method is certainly worth the trying, and immediately. To make it work, there should be continuous in-service training for every man on the force.

We believe that USL would be a willing partner in training these men for the better protection of the community.

Funds also enter the picture in the need for specialized equipment for use at a crime scene, for analysis of evidence, processing of data, to give a professional lawman the tools that he must have. But here again, we think the law enforcement agencies are missing a bet in not utilizing the computer centers at USL, one of the most highly regarded in the nation.

The ultimate answer, as we have often suggested editorially, is the creation of a Metropolitan Police Force with sufficient manpower and money.

Combination of the two forces could possibly bring the manpower to recommended levels, would give a larger pool of trained officers to put into specialized services, would create a force large enough to give every officer regular advancement and refresher training to keep up with the latest developments in his profession.

Combination would eliminate present duplication of efforts in vital areas and would provide adequate police personnel for other Lafayette Parish communities who now rely heavily on a spread-too-thinly sheriff’s department for prime police protection.

This newspaper believes that serious consideration should be given to the creation of a Civilian Police Board, to recommend procedures for the combination of the two departments and eventually regulate the Metropolitan Police Force created by the combination.

Such a board should consist of representatives appointed by the City of Lafayette, the Lafayette Parish Police Jury, the Sheriff’s Department, the City Police Department, the Lafayette Bar Association and a representative of the District Attorney’s office.

It would, after the combination of departments, remain in existence and maintain civilian jurisdiction over the police force. The board would select a professional lawman to head the new police force, subject to the approval of the city and parish governing bodies.

The mayor-elect and most of the candidates now seeking city council seats have spoken out favorably toward the combination of or great cooperation between the two police agencies. But the time for words is past. We urge strongly that the new city government make work toward this combination one of the prime objectives immediately.

Lafayette must have better police protection. We believe this is what it will take.

The Advertiser pledges its fullest support to any endeavor that will upgrade the quality of law enforcement in our community.