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The City of LaGrange Partnering with Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles to Improve Communications with Communities

LaGrange, Ga. April 29, 2021 – LaGrange Mayor Jim Thornton, LaGrange Police Chief Lou Dekmar and District Attorney Herb Cranford met with Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles Director Chris Barnett and staff members this week to discuss ways to best communicate to ensure the public’s safety.



Left to right: Field Services Director Felecia Holloway, District Attorney Herb Cranford, LPD Chief Lou Dekmar, State Board of Pardons and Paroles Executive Director Chris Barnett, LaGrange Mayor Jim Thornton, Clemency Critical Analysis Unit Manager Crystal Moon

“Any way we can assist our local leaders and our communities to make a safer Georgia, that’s what we want to do,” said State Board of Pardons and Paroles Public Affairs Director Steve Hayes. “We were able to show our city leaders some tools that will help assist them in keeping the community safe. Communications is key. We want all city leaders to know if they need us, we’re there for them. That’s what we’re down here for is to bridge that professional relationship.”

“We had a great meeting and we’re feeling really good about our relationship that we have and our ability to work together moving forward,” said District Attorney Herb Cranford.

In January, the LaGrange City Council initially discussed the rise in crime rate and in March the council unanimously passed a resolution asking state leaders to study methods and trends in the early release of offenders.

“The council has been concerned of late about an increase in crime that was attributable to people out on bond, out on probation or released on parole. We were also concerned about the higher levels of recidivism so we adopted a resolution in March expressing that concern. That resolution was shared with our statewide partners,” said Mayor Jim Thornton. “Several of them have responded and we’re trying to work on ways to have better communication and a more open dialogue with our local agencies as well as our state agencies involved in the criminal justice system.”

According to LPD Chief Lou Dekmar, 70% of the homicide **suspects** in 2020 were out on bond after being charged with a serious felony or out on bond while being on probation or parole and 80% of the homicide **victims** in 2020 were out on bond, on probation or parole. The percentage of number of parolees suspected committing crimes was very low.

“Within a very short period of time after the city council passed the resolution, the Georgia Department of Community Supervision, which is responsible for probation and parole supervision, reached out and wanted to meet with Mayor Thornton and me,” said LPD Chief Lou Dekmar. “It was a productive meeting. The executive director of the parole board will now be facilitating information that in the past we weren’t sure we could receive. They also want to pilot a program with LaGrange to help improve communities throughout the state.”

The pilot program with the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles and LaGrange Police will allow LPD to weigh in with additional facts or information when the board is collecting information on someone that may help mitigate or aggravate the position of parole for the subject.

Representatives plan to meet again in the next few months.

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