



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

MONDAY, MAY 8, 2023
9:00 a.m.

**CVAG Conference Room
73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 119
Palm Desert, CA 92260**

Members of the Committee and the public may attend and participate by video at the following remote location:

**Blythe City Hall
235 N Broadway, Room A
Blythe, CA 92225
760-922-6161**

Members of the public may use the following link for listening access and ability to address the Public Safety Committee when called upon:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81689869966?pwd=VTZsSGNVSVRtYUpQa04ydndLa2JyQT09>

**Dial In: +1 669 900 9128
Webinar ID: 816 8986 9966
Password: 696680**

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO CONNECT VIA DIAL IN OPTION, PLEASE CALL 760-346-1127

Public comment is encouraged to be emailed to the Public Safety Committee meeting prior to the meeting at cvag@cvag.org by 5:00 p.m. on the day prior to the committee meeting. Comments intended to be read aloud should be no more than 300 characters.

**THIS MEETING IS HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE.
ACTION MAY RESULT ON ANY ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA.**

**UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL ACTION ITEMS WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR FINAL APPROVAL.**

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chair Waymond Fermon, Councilmember, City of Indio

2. **ROLL CALL**

A. **Member Roster**

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3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

4. **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

This is the time and place for members of the public to address the Public Safety Committee on agenda items. At the discretion of the Chair, comments may be taken at the time items are presented. Please limit comments to three (3) minutes.

5. **CHAIR /COMMITTEE MEMBER/CVAG STAFF COMMENTS**

6. **EX-OFFICIO UPDATES**

7. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. **Approve the February 13, 2023 Public Safety Committee Meeting Minutes**

P5

8. **DISCUSSION/ ACTION**

A. **School Resource Officers in the Coachella Valley – Erica Felci**

P10

Recommendation: Discuss the use of school resource officers and provide staff direction on taking a formal position on their deployment at local school districts

B. **Roundtable Discussion of Coachella Valley Crime Trends – Erica Felci**

P35

Recommendation: Information

9. **INFORMATION**

- A. **Attendance Record** P43
- B. **Update on the Looming Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison** P44
- C. **Update on Efforts to Regulate Mylar Balloons** P48

10. **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

This is the time and place for members of the public to address the Public Safety Committee on items of general interest within the purview of this committee. Please limit comments to two (2) minutes.

11. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Upcoming Meetings:

The next meeting of the **Public Safety Committee** will be held on Monday, June 12, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. at the CVAG conference room, 73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 119, Palm Desert, 92260.

The next meeting of the **Executive Committee** will be held on Monday, June 5, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. at the CVAG conference room, 73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 119, Palm Desert, 92260

12. **ADJOURNMENT**

Item 2A

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Public Safety Committee
Member Roster
2022-2023**



Voting Members	
Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember John Preckwinkle III
City of Blythe	Councilmember Johnny Rodriguez
City of Cathedral City	Councilmember Raymond Gregory – VICE CHAIR
City of Coachella	Councilmember Frank Figueroa
City of Desert Hot Springs	Councilmember Roger Nuñez
City of Indian Wells	Councilmember Dana Reed
City of Indio	Councilmember Waymond Fermon - CHAIR
City of La Quinta	Councilmember John Peña
City of Palm Desert	Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla
City of Palm Springs	Mayor Grace Garner
City of Rancho Mirage	Councilmember Meg Marker
County of Riverside	Supervisor V. Manuel Perez
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember Desiree Franco
Ex-Officio Members	
Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Robert Bradbury, Emergency Services Manager
California Highway Patrol	Dennis Woodbury, Commander
Cathedral City Fire	Michael Contreras, Fire Chief
Cathedral City Police	George Crum, Chief of Police
Desert Hot Springs Police	Jim Henson, Chief of Police
District Attorney's Office	Michael Hestrin, District Attorney
Indio Police	Mike Washburn, Chief of Police
Palm Desert Sheriff Station	Dean Agnoletto, Captain
Palm Springs Fire	Paul Alvarado, Incoming Chief
Palm Springs Police	Andrew Mills, Chief of Police
Riverside County Fire Department	Robert Fish, Deputy Chief
Riverside County Probation Department	Ron Miller, Chief Probation Officer
Riverside County Sheriff's Department	Sheriff Chad Bianco
Thermal Sheriff Station	Michael Bianco, Captain
U.S. Border Patrol	David Kim

ITEM 7A

Public Safety Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 13, 2023



The audio file for this meeting can be found at: <http://www.cvag.org/audio.htm>

1. **CALL TO ORDER** - The meeting was called to order by Chair Waymond Fermon, City of Indio, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom videoconference, pursuant to AB 361 and the guidelines for virtual meetings.
2. **ROLL CALL** - Roll call was taken and it was determined that a quorum was present.

Members Present

Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember John Preckwinkle III (<i>arrived at Item 5</i>)
City of Blythe	Mayor Pro Tem Johnny Rodriguez
City of Coachella	Councilmember Frank Figueroa
City of Desert Hot Springs	Mayor Pro Tem Roger Nuñez
City of Cathedral City	Councilmember Raymond Gregory, <i>Vice Chair</i>
City of Indio	Councilmember Waymond Fermon, <i>Chair</i>
City of La Quinta	Councilmember John Peña
City of Palm Desert	Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla
City of Palm Springs	Mayor Grace Garner (<i>arrived at Item 4</i>)
City of Rancho Mirage	Councilmember Meg Marker
County of Riverside	Juan Perez, County COO

Ex-Officio Members Present

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Robert Bradbury, Emergency Services Manager
Desert Hot Springs Police	Chief Jim Henson
City of Palm Springs Fire	Acting Fire Chief Jason Loya
City of Indio Police	Chief Mike Washburn
City of Palm Springs Police	Chief Andrew Mills
Riverside County Sheriff	Lieutenant David Wright
Riverside County Fire	Deputy Chief Robert Fish

Members & Ex-Officios Not Present

City of Indian Wells	Councilmember Dana Reed
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember Desiree Franco
California Highway Patrol	Commander Dennis Woodbury
Cathedral City Fire	Chief Michael Contreras
Cathedral City Police	Chief George Crum
Riverside County Probation	Cristina Castro & Crystal Nieto
District Attorney's Office	Michael Hestrin
Palm Desert Sheriff's Substation	Captain Dean Agnoletto
Thermal Sheriff Station	Captain Michael Bianco
U.S. Customs and Border Patrol	Assistant Chief Patrol Agent David Kim

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A. Moment of Silence

Chair Fermon led the Public Safety Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance. Following the pledge, Chair Fermon asked the Committee to observe a moment of silence for Riverside County Sheriff Deputies Darnell Calhoun and Isaiah Cordero who were killed while on duty in recent months.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

None.

5. CHAIR / COMMITTEE MEMBER/CVAG STAFF COMMENTS

Chair Fermon welcomed new Committee members: Coachella Councilmember Frank Figueroa, Indian Wells Councilmember Dana Reed, Rancho Mirage Councilmember Meg Marker and Torres Martinez Councilmember Desiree Franco. Chair Fermon also discussed the beam signing ceremony of the new Indio Police Department campus, and provided an update on the Monroe Bridge traffic operations, educational outreach and improvements.

Mayor Pro Tem Quintanilla thanked law enforcement for assistance with the 5K and half marathon event over the weekend. Mayor Pro Tem Quintanilla also discussed an ongoing problem with drivers doing donuts in intersections as well as a business rebate program for security cameras or camera upgrades.

Assistant Executive Director Erica Felci noted this was CVAG's 50th anniversary year and also extended a welcome to new Committee members.

Ms. Felci also addressed a question about the upcoming meeting schedule and use of virtual meetings.

6. EX-OFFICIO COMMENTS

None.

7. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approve the November 14, 2022 Public Safety Committee Meeting Minutes

IT WAS MOVED BY COUNCILMEMBER GREGORY AND SECONDED BY MAYOR PRO TEM QUINTANILLA TO APPROVE THE CONSENT CALENDAR.

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 10 AYES, 1 ABSTAINING AND 2 MEMBERS ABSENT.

Councilmember John Preckwinkle	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Johnny Rodriguez	AYE
Councilmember Raymond Gregory	AYE
Councilmember Frank Figueroa	ABSTAIN
Mayor Pro Tem Roger Nuñez	AYE
Councilmember Dana Reed	ABSENT
Councilmember Waymond Fermon	AYE

Councilmember John Peña	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla	AYE
Mayor Grace Garner	AYE
Councilmember Meg Marker	AYE
COO Juan Perez	AYE
Councilmember Denise Franco	ABSENT

8. DISCUSSION / ACTION

A. Update on the Looming Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison – Presentation by California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Due to a conflict of interest, Councilmember Fermon, a correctional officer, recused himself from the conversation. Councilmember Gregory led the discussion as acting Chair.

Representatives from the CDCR – including Prison Closure Manager Charles "Chuck" Callahan, External Affairs Deputy Chief David Maldonado and Deputy Director of EDD Workforce Javier Romero provided an update on the State’s decision to close Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. This included an overview of next steps for the employees and potential for grant investments in the community.

Robust member discussion ensued, with an interest from members in understanding how Chuckawalla was selected for closure. It was noted by Mayor Pro Tem Rodriguez and Mallory Crecelius, Blythe’s interim city manager, that additional information had been requested but not received from the state. City representatives also noted they are working with the City of Norco and state legislators to advocate for a prion swap and avoid the closure.

IT WAS MOVED BY COUNCILMEMBER RODRIGUEZ AND SECONDED BY MAYOR PRO TEM NUNEZ TO ASK THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO DIRECT THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CVAG STAFF TO ASSIST THE CITY OF BLYTHE IN THEIR REQUEST TO REEXAMINE AND RECONSIDER THE CLOSURE OF CHUCKAWALLA VALLEY STATE PRISON AND IF THAT CLOSURE APPEARS TO MOVE FORWARD, THAT CVAG PUSH FOR THE REPURPOSING OF THE FACILITY AND MEANINGFUL MITIGATION OF THE LOCAL EFFECTS.

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 9 AYES, 1 NAY, 1 MEMBER RECUSED AND 2 MEMBERS ABSENT.

Councilmember John Preckwinkle	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Johnny Rodriguez	AYE
Councilmember Raymond Gregory	AYE
Councilmember Frank Figueroa	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Roger Nuñez	AYE
Councilmember Dana Reed	ABSENT
Councilmember Waymond Fermon	RECUSED
Councilmember John Peña	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla	AYE
Mayor Grace Garner	NAY
Councilmember Meg Marker	AYE
COO Juan Perez	AYE
Councilmember Denise Franco	ABSENT

C. Roundtable Discussion of Coachella Valley Crime Trends – Erica Felci

This item was taken out of order. In the interest of time, Chair Fermon recommended that this item be continued to the next Committee meeting to allow for full discussion.

IT WAS MOVED BY MAYOR PRO TEM NUNEZ AND SECONDED BY COUNCILMEMBER GREGORY TO CONTINUE THE ITEM TO THE NEXT MEETING.

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 11 AYES AND 2 MEMBERS ABSENT.

Councilmember John Preckwinkle	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Johnny Rodriguez	AYE
Councilmember Raymond Gregory	AYE
Councilmember Frank Figueroa	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Roger Nuñez	AYE
Councilmember Dana Reed	ABSENT
Councilmember Waymond Fermon	AYE
Councilmember John Peña	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla	AYE
Mayor Grace Garner	AYE
Councilmember Meg Marker	AYE
COO Juan Perez	AYE
Councilmember Denise Franco	ABSENT

B. Riverside County’s Coordinated Response to Asylum Seekers – Jeff Van Wagenen, Riverside County’s County Executive Officer

Riverside County CEO Jeff Van Wagenen provided an update on the influx of migrants to the County amid uncertainty of Title 42.

Member discussion ensued. Chair Fermon asked CVAG staff to continue updating the Committee on available federal and county resources. No action was taken as this was an informational item.

9. INFORMATION – The following item was provided for information only:

A. Attendance Record

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Meetings:

The next meeting of the **Public Safety Committee** will be held on Monday, May 8, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. with additional meeting logistics to be announced.

The next meeting of the **Executive Committee** will be held on Monday, February 27, 2023, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom webinar.

12. ADJOURN

Chair Fermon adjourned in memory of Deputies Darnell Calhoun and Isaiah Cordero at 10:14 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Barnwell, Management Analyst

ITEM 8A

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Public Safety Committee
May 8, 2023**



STAFF REPORT

Subject: School Resource Officers in the Coachella Valley

Contact: Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director (efelci@cvag.org)

Recommendation: Discuss the use of school resource officers and provide staff direction on taking a formal position on their deployment at local school districts

Background: In August 2022, the Public Safety Committee held a roundtable forum about the Coachella Valley's readiness and response plans to an active shooter situation, particularly at soft targets such as schools. The special meeting featured representatives from the Indio and Cathedral City Police Departments, the Coachella Valley's three school districts and from the Riverside University Health System-Behavioral Health's Desert Region. As was noted during the meeting, local law enforcement and schools have long planned for the unthinkable scenario of an active shooter situation. Additional trainings have been held since the May 24, 2022 mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, where 19 children and two teachers died in their classrooms.

At the request of La Quinta Councilmember John Peña, and with the concurrence of Chair Waymond Fermon, CVAG staff is now bringing forward the topic of school resource officers for the Public Safety Committee's consideration and discussion. Both Palm Springs Unified and Desert Sands Unified School Districts have agreements in place to have local law enforcement serve as school resource officers. Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) ended their agreements in 2018 and shifted to a restorative justice model for its school security. In recent months, this model has drawn public attention and led to calls from students and parents for additional security measures. The City of La Quinta on March 7, 2023 sent a letter to CVUSD (attached) to encourage the Superintendent and District Board take steps to reinstate school resource officers. A few weeks later, the CVUSD School Board received an update on the use of the restorative justice model, including a written summary (attached) and roll out of additional trainings for both central office and school-based staff.

CVAG's legislative platform broadly calls for "maintaining a safe and secure community, free of crime, while ensuring clean and engaging public spaces, is essential to maintaining vibrant and growing business and residential communities." It does not specify any positions related to school resource officers.

CVAG staff has invited the security and safety directors from all three school districts to attend the May meeting of the Public Safety Committee. As of the publication of this staff report, Desert Sands Unified had confirmed their attendance and Palm Springs Unified has provided a recap of their agreements (attached). CVAG staff is recommending the Public Safety Committee discuss the issue, the City of La Quinta's position and provide direction on any next steps. Should the Public Safety Committee recommend a position be taken, it would be presented to the CVAG Executive Committee for their approval in June 2023.

Fiscal Analysis: There is no cost to CVAG for this informational update.

Attachments:

1. City of La Quinta letter to CVUSD, March 7, 2023
2. CVUSD overview of Physical and Socio-Emotional Safety Measures, presented to School Board on March 30, 2023
3. Desert Sun article, "How a rural California district became a hotspot in the nationwide debate about school policing," March 24, 2023
4. PSUSD recap of school resource officers

March 8, 2023

Luis Valentino, Ph.D
Superintendent
Coachella Valley Unified School District
87225 Church Street
Thermal, CA 92274

Re: School Safety and Reinstatement of School Resource Officers at CVUSD

Dear Superintendent Valentino,

The City of La Quinta is joining parents and students in requesting Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) officials reinstate Riverside County Sheriff's Department School Resource Officers (SROs) as soon as possible to address the safety concerns at your schools. This request is memorialized in this letter as the result of the City Council's consideration and decision on the matter during its Regular Meeting yesterday, March 7, 2023.

Over the last four months, Riverside County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) deputies have responded to at least 11 incidents (including yesterday) of threats of school violence at various CVUSD schools, which have jeopardized student and staff safety.

Students and parents are demanding improved safety measures and urging CVUSD to return SROs to the schools to provide protection from violence and possible weapons brought to school by students. We are aware that SROs were removed from school campuses by the CVUSD Board in 2018 in favor of a "restorative justice model."

Our experience with Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD) is that SROs make a positive difference in their schools. SROs are on campus, relating with students and earning their trust. The SRO at La Quinta High School shared with our City Council members that in building those relationships, students feel comfortable coming to him and reporting concerns about anything they may have witnessed, thus allowing the SRO to respond swiftly and prevent a potential incident or tragedy from occurring. SROs can also quickly summon paramedics and other emergency crews needed to help students and faculty if there is a medical crisis on campus.

The CVUSD community has expressed its safety concerns at CVUSD Board meetings where many students and parents have attended in protest of these incidents, the lack of communication by the District, and the overall lack of safety measures. CVUSD students have also walked out of classes in protest, stating they should not be afraid to go to school.

We feel strongly that all students in the Coachella Valley deserve a positive and safe learning environment. Both Desert Sands Unified and Palm Springs Unified School Districts utilize SROs to enhance the safety of schools and protection of students, teachers, and faculty. Our concern and request to reinstate SROs at CVUSD stems from our desire to have an equitable environment of safety for our La Quinta residents who attend CVUSD schools, just like those who attend school in DSUSD.

Our City Council firmly believes students, teachers and administrators should be able to enjoy school without fearing for their safety every day they step on campus. Likewise, parents should not have to worry about the safety of their children when dropping them off for school each day. Students are supposed to feel safer with CVUSD's "Restorative Justice Model," however, the recent incidents and reactions clearly negate that feeling. We are interested in what metrics are used to measure the effectiveness of the Restorative Justice Model since SROs were eliminated in 2018, as well as any results achieved through this model.

Having SROs in schools is a standard practice with our other local districts. SROs work closely with school staff, students, and parents to provide a safe learning environment at local schools. Throughout our valley, including in La Quinta (since 2003), cities have stepped up to share the cost of SROs to ensure a higher level of safety for our children. The presence of SROs within schools also presents a career opportunity for public service, as the SROs often collaborate with Public Service Academies, ROTC groups, and Cadet programs.

We request that the CVUSD Board not wait for a tragedy to occur before they take action to improve school safety. The CVUSD Board is responsible to do all they can to protect students, parents and staff while on District campuses. We welcome the opportunity to discuss your plans to ensure a safer learning environment. We would be interested in resuming our "two-by-two" meetings (less than a quorum of the respective elected governing bodies) with City Council, School Board, and staff to further discuss solutions to this unsafe situation. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Linda Evans, Mayor
City of La Quinta



John Pena, Councilmember
City of La Quinta



Steve Sanchez, Mayor Pro Tem
City of La Quinta



Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Councilmember
City of La Quinta



Deborah McGarrey, Councilmember
City of La Quinta

Cc:
CVUSD School Board
V. Manuel Perez, Supervisor, Riverside County 4th District
Coachella City Council
Jon McMillen, City Manager, La Quinta



Coachella Valley Unified School District

Physical and Socio-Emotional Safety Measures

Mar 24, 2023

CURRENT: Physical Safety & Security Measures at CVHS

1. **CAMPUS SAFETY ASSISTANTS:** A dedicated security team oversees CVHS, manages entry points, and addresses security issues. They collaborate with school administrators and staff to ensure a secure environment.
2. **BACKPACK INSPECTIONS:** CVHS performs daily student backpack inspections to ensure a safe and secure learning environment.
3. **COOPERATION WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT:** CVUSD works closely with local law enforcement agencies to facilitate effective communication, leverage their resources, and organize responses to potential risks or crises.
4. **THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS:** The school features a multidisciplinary team who identifies, evaluates, categorizes, and manages threats or possible threats to school safety. This team determines the suitable response and intervention, including weapons on campus, fights, suicide risk assessments, and the creation of written safety plans and strategies.
5. **VISITOR CONTROL SYSTEMS:** CVHS employs RAPTOR Technologies, Visitor Management System (VMS), and Emergency Management System (EMS). VMS screens for sex offenders and custody violations while providing district-wide visitor data, and EMS is an application that can be activated from a desktop, a tablet, or a mobile device to notify staff of an Active Shooter, Lockdown, Shelter in Place, Evacuation, and Fire. EMS will also assist in the event of reunification.
6. **TEMPORARY PROTECTIVE FENCING:** The temporary fencing is installed at the front of the school to create a single point of entry, facilitating backpack checks. We are also looking into replacing parts of the perimeter fencing from chain link to wrought iron.
7. **CANINE DETECTION SERVICES:** Specially trained dogs perform unannounced visits throughout the academic year to detect drugs, alcohol, ammunition, gunpowder, and firearms.
8. **COMMUNICATION RADIOS:** Essential staff members are equipped with radios to improve communication during emergencies and routine operations.
9. **CLASSROOM DOOR LOCK GUIDELINES:** Instructors must keep classroom doors locked and closed at all times, with substitutes adhering to the same policy.
10. **EMPLOYEE TRAINING:** The majority of staff members have received ALICE training and will participate in ongoing emergency protocol training. Some teachers and administrators have received de-escalation training, with additional training to be provided.

11. **STAFF and STUDENT PREPAREDNESS & DRILLS:** Staff and Students receive training in the Standard Response Protocol for lockdown, shelter in place and evacuation for fire and earthquakes. Regular drills are conducted.
12. **THREAT REPORTING:** CVHS students, parents, employees, and community members can report potential threats or concerns through various methods, such as online reporting (Sprigeo), contacting campus or district administrators, or Campus Security Assistants.
13. **STUDENT IDs (campus):** All students must visibly wear their district-issued identification card when on school property. This will assist in identifying students while on campus.
14. **STUDENT VEHICLE REGISTRATION:** All students parking at the site register their cars with the front office staff. Staff verifies that students have valid drivers' licenses, vehicle registration and proof of insurance.

CONSIDERATION: Physical Safety & Security Measures at CVHS

15. **SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS:** School resource officers are present on campuses to guarantee the safety and security of students, faculty, and visitors. They patrol the premises, handle emergencies, and collaborate with school administrators on safety protocols.
16. **METAL DETECTORS OR SCANNERS:** We are exploring Evolv Technologies. The Evolv weapons detection system combines powerful sensor technology with proven artificial intelligence (AI), security ecosystem integrations, and comprehensive venue analytics to ensure safer, more accurate threat detection at an unprecedented speed and volume.
17. **TRANSPARENT BACKPACKS:** A transparent backpack policy would promote greater transparency and dissuade students from bringing banned items to school.
18. **VIDEO DOORBELL SYSTEM:** CVUSD campuses will use an external video doorbell system for controlling access to school facilities. It will be the first layer of the screening process where front office staff can screen those entering the campus.
19. **PERMANENT PROTECTIVE FENCING:** Fencing would be installed at the front of the school to create a single point of entry. We are also looking into replacing parts of the perimeter fencing from chain link to wrought iron.
20. **SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS (Campus):** Camera infrastructure will be upgraded to give security cameras 24-hour surveillance.
21. **SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS (BUS):** Cameras will be added to additional buses so security cameras can provide surveillance while students ride the bus.
22. **STUDENT IDs (Bus):** All students must visibly wear their district-issued identification card when on the school bus. This will assist in identifying students while on campus.

CURRENT: Socio-Emotional Safety Measures at CVHS

1. **WELLNESS TEAM:** In collaboration with Student Support Services and our transformational learning partners' frameworks, wellness staff members assist students and families at CVHS by addressing their social, emotional, and behavioral needs, fostering a secure and supportive atmosphere.

2. **LICENSED THERAPIST:** CVHS has a Family & Student Support Therapist assigned to its campus via Latino Commission. Therapists offer student mental health services and family resources on campus and at the Latino Counseling Commission center.
3. **ADULT COUNSELING SUPPORT:** With the support of the Latino Commission, CVHS staff have access to counseling support through Student Support Services.
4. **TRANSFORMATIONAL / BLENDED LEARNING:** The model employs a **holistic approach** to create a supportive learning environment where students can develop social and emotional skills, build strong relationships, and achieve academic success.

EDUCATION

How a rural California district became a hotspot in the nationwide debate about school policing



Jonathan Horwitz

Palm Springs Desert Sun

Published 5:24 p.m. PT March 24, 2023 | Updated 7:40 p.m. PT March 26, 2023

On the outskirts of eastern Riverside County, one semi-rural district's discussion of how to best protect students has come to epitomize a nationwide debate over the role law enforcement officers should play in schools.

High school students say they feel unsafe at school following a series of about a dozen incidents in recent months where administrators have called the sheriff's department to deal with reports of weapons or trespassers on various campuses. Some say students are acting with impunity — bringing weapons and drugs to school — without the threat of law enforcement.

The Coachella Valley Unified School District removed sheriff deputies known as school resource officers from its high school campuses in 2018 in favor of a restorative justice model intended to:

- reduce suspensions and expulsions;
- create a healthier school climate without armed officers present; and
- tackle student behavioral issues through mentorship and social-emotional learning, rather than heavy-handed discipline and referrals to law enforcement.

Since then, suspension rates have dropped about 25%, and far fewer students have been referred to the juvenile justice system. But many students and teachers believe safety has been compromised, and want officers back full time.

Some research, including a study from the ASU Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, suggests that school resource officers improve response times to incidents at schools and

improve perceptions of school safety.

But whether armed school resource officers actually make schools safer overall is widely debated and the subject of many academic studies, in large part because the presence of police officers on schools tends to correlate with higher suspension rates and criminalization of students of color — just as it did in Coachella Valley Unified schools prior to when the district voted to remove officers in 2018.

The role law enforcement should play in school security is a complex question that has drawn passionate disagreement from school board trustees and community members alike. District leaders are signaling that a solution to school safety is less about any single policy. How the two approaches — policing and restorative justice — intersect or not on school campuses strikes at much deeper questions about coming-of-age, discipline, law enforcement and reform in America.

Tensions flare at Coachella Valley Unified campuses

Hundreds of students from two district high schools — Desert Mirage High and Coachella Valley High — walked out of class in late February and marched 3 to 6 miles to the district's office to call for better safety measures, including a return of sheriff's deputies to schools.

They marched because Riverside County sheriff's deputies have been called to the district's schools at least 12 times in five months, including once in November when they ordered the mass evacuation of 3,700 students after reports of a suspicious device in a backpack found at a campus shared by three schools. Deputies have been called to CVUSD campuses several more times since then to investigate reports of a student with a gun at school.

Two of the district's high schools were locked down four times in February and March. Students reported knives or guns at Coachella Valley High five times in February.

While the district has not reported any physical injuries as a result of these incidents, students are asking the board of trustees if it would take a violent outburst for them to bring back sheriff deputies.

“I don't feel safe at school,” said Desert Mirage 10th-grader Jenny Bravo, adding that “implementing police officers” is the only thing at this point that would make her feel safe at her school. “If there were a problem, the police would be there.”

One student arrived at a February board meeting in a white tank top covered in red paint

board signs with messages like, “I shouldn’t be afraid to go to school” and “We still live in fear.”

Many in the community echo Bravo and say that a law enforcement presence would quicken response times to school threats.

It is unclear what law enforcement response times have been in response to each incident. CVUSD Trustee Trinidad Arredondo suggested it might be between 15 and 20 minutes. The national average police response time to an active shooter incident at schools is around 15 minutes, according to FBI data from 2000-2017.

Even after law enforcement responds to a school threat, their effectiveness in an emergency has come under a great deal of scrutiny. In May 2022, police waited more than an hour outside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas while a shooter was active inside. Texas officials say armed police officers wearing body armor could have stopped the shooting three minutes after it began. Ultimately, 21 people — 19 students and two educators — died.

In Coachella Valley Unified, how and when the district has reported threats has also been a concern to parents and students.

District officials took more than an hour to report to law enforcement officers that they found a handgun at Desert Mirage High School in Thermal last November. The district took six days to tell parents about a loaded gun found at Coachella Valley High School in January.

"People are upset because it took them a long time to react," said Elizabeth Tabarez, whose daughter attends one of the schools evacuated last November.

Since then, the district has taken steps meant to improve security.

In recent weeks, officials installed temporary fencing around Coachella Valley High and instituted mandatory backpack checks for all students entering the grounds. They've also increased the use of canine detection services to detect drugs, alcohol, ammunition and firearms and provided a majority of staff with active shooter training and some with de-escalation training.

Tabarez and others say that's not enough. They insist on a law enforcement presence.

"What I will want to see the school board do different is to add a sheriff on campus," she said. "I've always insisted they should have them, but they don't want to."

Most district leaders are reluctant to bring back officers, fearing what sort of impact that could have on students of color.

Sheriff deputies removed in 2018

Coachella Valley Unified serves over 16,000 students from communities within a sprawling 1,250-square-mile area of mostly farmland and desert. Almost 98% of students served by the district identify as Hispanic. Nearly nine in 10 students in the district qualify as socioeconomically disadvantaged, according to state data.

In 2018, the district's board of trustees voted to remove school resource officers from high schools in favor of a restorative justice program intended to create a healthier school climate, reduce suspensions and tackle root causes of behavioral issues rather than disciplining students in a heavy-handed fashion.

At the time, much larger school districts in California, including Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Diego Unified and Santa Ana Unified, had begun to invest millions of dollars in restorative justice.

Whereas those districts hired and trained restorative justice coordinators, CVUSD never spent a vast majority of the \$300,000 the board of trustees had already approved for the program, according to reporting from EdSource.

Five years later, the district has made investments in mental health and behavioral support, but still lacks a districtwide restorative justice coordinator and trained program managers at every school site.

The onus to implement restorative justice has fallen largely on the shoulders of teachers and staff already experiencing burnout amid ongoing labor negotiations, personnel shortages and efforts to boost academic performance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that saw test scores plunge nationwide.

“Right now, teachers are implementing restorative justice practices during prep time or after school,” said CVUSD Trustee Silvia Paz. “That’s a burden.”

Multiple trustees are asking for patience from the community. Others say the district needs to imminently hire restorative justice personnel.

But, after half a decade — and three superintendents later — parents and students are calling for change.

What is restorative justice?

Rather than justice as punishment, restorative justice conceives of justice as repair to the harm caused by crime and conflict.

“Restorative justice allows students to take responsibility for their actions versus treating them like criminals and exiling them through suspensions and expulsions,” said Daniela Rojas, a project manager at Alianza Coachella Valley. Alianza is a nonprofit that has long advocated for the school district to invest in restorative justice. Its executive director is Paz, a school board member, former CVUSD teacher and Harvard Kennedy School of Government graduate.

Compared to traditional discipline, restorative justice is a holistic set of social services.

For instance, if a student vandalizes a bathroom, rather than suspending the student, a behavior interventionist — perhaps a therapist — would counsel the student to understand why they did that. Next, the student would talk with a school custodian about the work required to repair the bathroom. The student might even help with the repairs, according to restorative justice consultant Reuben Roberts.

Ideally, a social worker would help the student and their family connect with community resources to address problems they face at home, which could range from food insecurity, gang violence or family issues that end up affecting behavior at school.

In practice at CVUSD, implementation has fallen largely on teachers who might not be adequately trained as mental health professionals and who might already feel weighed down by their normal job responsibilities and stressors.

“Teachers are trying to teach math; they're trying to teach English; they're trying to teach science,” Arredondo said. “Now we're asking them to stop what they're doing to run a restorative justice circle.”

For Bravo, the circles, where students can share what's on their mind with peers and mentors, are challenging because it's hard for her to share the emotions affecting her behavior.

“The expectation is to be ideal,” she said, referring to the load of academic, athletic and social pressures weighing on her. “That leads to a lot of bottled-up emotions and that becomes stress.”

“It’s hard to open up,” she said. “I don’t want their pity.”

Doing restorative justice right requires buy-in from staff, hiring additional personnel and a commitment to the idea that student behavior can be reformed.

It is potentially a long and slow process. Understanding the root causes of behavioral issues can take weeks, months or years, and is different for every individual.

While many parents of students in Coachella Valley Unified are fed up with the slow implementation, others are tired of what they see as a perpetual, “vicious cycle” that they say begins with law enforcement on school campuses and continues with low-income students of color sent to the juvenile justice system with damaged prospects for successful academic and financial careers.

"Our children want to move forward," said parent and restorative justice advocate Mariana Roman. "They don't want to feel intimidated by a law enforcement officer at school."

“I believe, slowly but surely, we are making progress," added Sandra Ramirez, a parent advocate involved with CVUSD’s restorative justice transformation over the last 10 years. “Our children and our students deserve to believe in themselves. Restorative justice is about believing in yourself and believing in your peers without having to have police at the ready.”

Investing in students' emotional well-being while keeping them safe is an ambitious task for schools with or without police on campus, especially considering California schools already face a shortage of counselors and student mental health supports.

Nevertheless, studies suggest that the rewards of doing restorative justice correctly can be profound.

Benefits could include reduced suspension rates, fewer juveniles referred to the prison system, fewer repeat offenses against school policies and better academic performance, especially among students of color who tend to be disproportionately penalized by school officials and law enforcement officers.

Yet, many school districts continue to implement punitive practices to control student behavior. Why?

The 'American mindset'

Punishment over reform is part of the “American mindset,” Roberts said.

“We have a punitive culture,” he said. “Historically, American culture has thought of discipline as equal to teaching a lesson.”

In fact, corporal punishment, which has a long and troubling history in American schools, remains legal in 19 states, including in Oklahoma where lawmakers recently voted to reject a bill that would have banned its use on children with disabilities.

In California, corporal punishment in school is illegal, but the idea of discipline has strong roots among teachers.

A decade ago, fewer than half of educators working in Coachella Valley Unified believed that “every student can be a success,” according to survey data.

Educators are not going to invest in the future of students if they don’t believe students can be successful, Roberts explained. A Bay Area resident, he also consults with Oakland Unified.

“The biggest challenge to restorative justice is systemic,” he said. “It’s getting buy-in from adults. It’s easier to give a consequence than to do meaningful work.”

But if the point of “teaching a lesson” is to help young people avoid repeating mistakes, then data suggests restorative justice could work better than traditional punishments.

That idea might sound familiar.

Restorative justice is not just a practice at schools. It’s an idea in law enforcement, generally, and a rethinking of the way the American law enforcement system works, from policing to prisons.

The criminalization of 'defiance'

Around the time CVUSD cut ties with law enforcement, the restorative justice movement — which has existed for decades — was picking up steam across California, and not just in major school districts.

With overcrowded juvenile justice facilities and a backlog of juvenile court cases, some law enforcement officers and judicial officials supported reform.

“Although some people may view restorative justice as ‘soft on crime,’ this approach can improve the dynamics of how society deals with youthful offenders,” Lt. David Newton of the Fresno Police Department wrote in an article published by the FBI in 2016.

Two years later, the Judicial Branch of California cited a study that suggested restorative justice can cut down reoffending by 83%. In Oakland Unified schools that implemented restorative justice, suspension rates fell by 40% in one year among Black students.

Back in eastern Riverside and Imperial counties, a group of parents had been calling on Coachella Valley Unified to remove school resource officers from campuses for more than five years before the district made that change.

By 2018, CVUSD was suspending nearly one in 20 students each school year — far higher than the state average of about one in 30. Black and Native American youths were being suspended at approximately double the rate of Hispanic students, while white students were suspended 20% less often.

The district was also involved with a controversial Riverside County probation program that many say pushed youths into the criminal justice system unnecessarily.

A majority of nearly 2,000 students countywide referred to the program during the 2017-18 school year were sent for defiance.

The American Civil Liberties Union sued the county program, which agreed in a 2019 settlement with the nonprofit to no longer enroll youths in the probation program for non-criminal behavior such as talking back to school officials, truancy or academic problems.

"We shouldn't allow our students to make contact with criminal justice," Paz said in 2018. "We should be focusing on college readiness."

In 2018, her organization suggested that cutting ties with law enforcement could possibly improve student outcomes in the district.

Over five years, suspension rates at CVUSD schools have indeed fallen and are nearly in line with state averages. In California, school funding is not directly tied with suspension rates, but the state does have a program to prioritize certain investments in districts with higher-than-average homelessness and foster youth, school suspension and expulsion and dropout rates. A 2017 UCLA study estimated that school suspensions ultimately cost the state billions of dollars in economic damage due to their effect on lower graduation rates and long-term higher taxpayer costs for criminal justice, welfare, health care and other economic ramifications.

Graduation rates and test scores in Coachella Valley Unified have improved, although they continue to lag behind state averages. In 2018, about one in five CVUSD students did not

graduate — slightly behind state averages. In 2022, about one in 10 CVUSD students did not graduate — slightly ahead of the state average, which has also improved.

However, CVUSD students continue to score "low" and "very low" relative to grade level standards in English language arts and math. And, only 44% of the district's English learners — students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses — are making progress toward English language proficiency. Almost half of students in the district are classified as English learners.

Chronic absenteeism has gone up across California schools since the COVID-19 pandemic. But it's alarmingly high in Coachella Valley Unified, where 46% of students missed at least 10% of instructional days last year.

It's unclear what impact restorative justice and school policing might play in these incredibly complex and overarching school performance metrics.

Yet, some say the specter of potential violence this year at multiple school sites has worsened problems and created a culture of fear.

Whether police or restorative justice — or some combination of both — would help depends upon who you ask.

Can school resource officers and restorative justice coexist?

While restorative justice practices could help improve student outcomes in the long-run, Arredondo believes sheriff's deputies can assist in dire situations with physical threats.

“The presence of an officer there is going to keep students safe,” he said. “We won't have to wait 15 to 20 minutes for law enforcement to show up; I think that's important.”

He says adequately-trained sheriff deputies, especially those born and raised in the community, can be part of a restorative justice team. He points out that Coachella Valley High has a public safety academy, and the district could prioritize hiring school resource officers from a pool of law enforcement officers who have graduated from that program.

“They can also play a key role in identifying things that are going on, and can put kids in different spaces so that they can get the help that they need,” Arredondo said.

Investing in revamped and purportedly culturally sensitive training for school resource officers while also funding restorative justice practices is something that nearby Palm Springs Unified School District is trying at its high schools. Their decision to keep school resource officers after the pandemic and in the wake of George Floyd's murder was not without its critics.

Restorative justice advocates are skeptical that police should be stationed at schools.

"Having uniformed police on campus is not healthy," Roberts said, referring to concerns about how law enforcement interacts with young people of color.

Rojas' opinion was somewhere between Arredondo's and Roberts.

"I think we need to really reevaluate what are school resource officers' roles on campus and if they are going to approach our students in situations in a way that's going to address their needs versus treating them as criminals," she said.

Aside from Arredondo, the six additional members of the CVUSD Board, including Paz, have not publicly supported the return of officers to schools.

Veteran trustee Joey Acuña has compared adding a school resource officer to creating a prison-like environment. But he agrees with Arredondo that some changes need to be made to make schools safer.

"We can turn our schools into prisons. We can have a sheriff at each corner of our (campus). Our kids are gonna do what they're gonna do. I'm sorry that that just seems to be the (case). It's almost like they don't care, and they feel that there's no consequences."

His and others' concerns with school policing are rooted in data.

A 2021 ACLU of Southern California report cited that Black students' arrest rates are 7.4 times higher in schools with assigned law enforcement than in schools without and "Latine" students' arrest rates are 6.9 times higher in schools with assigned law enforcement than in schools without. Their report also cited that students with disabilities' arrest rates are 4.6 times higher in schools with assigned law enforcement than in schools without.

Possible solutions

While students and parents are divided about how to create safe learning environments, CVUSD board members and restorative justice advocates have some ideas.

Paz, Rojas, Roberts and Arredondo all told The Desert Sun that the district should hire a restorative justice coordinator and invest in school site personnel focused on implementation.

Currently, it is unclear whether CVUSD officials are actually following through with their restorative justice mandate. Through a spokesperson, the district's superintendent, Luis Valentino, declined multiple requests for an interview on the topics of school security and implementing restorative justice.

CVUSD has built wellness centers at schools where students can theoretically go — or get referred to — to seek help with a mental health professional or social worker.

But Bravo, the Desert Mirage High student, told The Desert Sun that school staff don't really "advertise" it.

And, without a coordinator, it is unclear what happens after students are referred to the wellness center. Perhaps, they receive counseling. Perhaps, the room ends up feeling more like detention.

Arredondo says the district has an accountability problem.

"If you're not accountable for your actions, then restorative justice doesn't work," he said.

Accountability doesn't have to be punitive, Arredondo explained. But there does have to be some reflection on why students behave certain ways.

Coachella Valley Unified has, in fact, invested in mental health supports — one prong of restorative justice. Last year, it provided mental health counseling to over 1,600 students — more than one in 10 enrolled in the district.

But without a clearinghouse of restorative justice data, it's hard to say what impact that intervention has had on reducing suspensions, crime and academic metrics.

Next steps: Education and funding

Paz and Arredondo might disagree about the role law enforcement officers should play on campus, but they both agree that restorative justice can work with sustained funding and better strategy.

Paz and Arredondo, along with consultants Rojas and Roberts, say a good strategy starts with educating the community about what restorative justice is and what it is not.

Tabarez, the parent, said she still did not have a good understanding of why the district removed school resource officers in 2018 and why they won't bring them back.

"Parents are the ones we need to engage, and really let them understand the work that we're trying to do and how they play a part in what we're trying to do," Arredondo said.

Strategy then extends to personnel decisions.

"Do we have the right staff at our wellness centers? Do we have enough staff? What's their role?" are questions that Arredondo said need to be answered.

Paz added that in addition to "a dedicated person at every school site to support implementation," the district should also continue to invest in training for all staff that will help them with mentoring and holding restorative justice circles as needed.

The district could be taking additional steps to train central office staff and site administrators to better implement restorative justice practices beginning later this spring. Bringing back school resource officers has not been taken off the table, either, according to a board document from Superintendent Valentino.

Another step is to improve staff buy-in. That starts with teacher recruitment.

In a three-year window last decade, CVUSD improved the number of teachers on staff who believed every student could be a success from 48% to 70%.

Rojas explained teacher buy-in is hugely important because restorative justice starts in the classroom.

For example, a teacher could choose to discipline a student for arriving late to class by "calling them out," sending them to detention or asking them to leave; or the teacher could circle back with the student to have a private conversation another time that will "treat them with dignity and privacy and address their needs."

Getting that buy-in is the "million-dollar question," Rojas said.

"That's what we've been trying to figure out for the longest time while also understanding and respecting that teachers are burnt out," she said.

Roberts, the consultant, says small group discussions among teachers are key.

"Teachers didn't choose the work for the pay," he said. "Ask them, why did you choose this work? What is your purpose?"

The answer is often to help kids advance through life, Roberts said. At its core, that is what restorative justice is all about, he added.

Roberts also advocated for hiring school climate officers or “culture keepers,” — roles embraced by Los Angeles Unified and Oakland Unified, respectively.

In lieu of school resource officers, these personnel aim to resolve conflicts and contribute to school safety through active listening and mediation.

CVUSD created a school climate committee last year, but has not shared its impacts to date.

Other solutions to restorative justice could come outside the school district. Alianza, the nonprofit, offers workshops for parents to understand the youth impacts of discipline at home and in the community.

California has also expanded a youth/peer court system — an alternative approach to the traditional juvenile justice system where youth charged with a first-time, non-violent offense have the option to waive the hearing and sentencing procedures of juvenile court and agree to a sentencing forum with a jury of the youth’s peers.

Youth court is under the supervision of a judge, and advocates say it helps young people better understand their rights, justice and the law, while being held accountable for their actions and avoiding a criminal record.

The cocktail of potential policy interventions to improve youth outcomes and safety is undeniably convoluted.

Back at CVUSD's last board meeting, students called for better safety measures, teachers called for higher wages, some parents called for law enforcement officers to return and others asked for them to be kept off campuses.

One thing everyone agreed on is that the situation is complex.

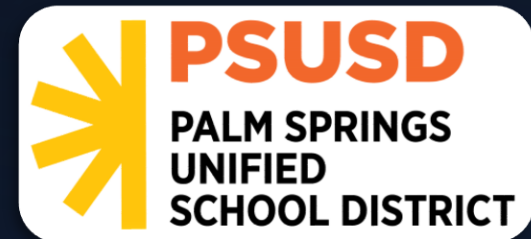
"There's no one silver bullet," Acuña said.

Jonathan Horwitz covers education for The Desert Sun. Reach him at jonathan.horwitz@desertsun.com.

BACKGROUND

After an internal assessment of the PSUSD School Resource Officer program, several priority areas were identified by the PSUSD Board of Education and our education-partners. Those areas are as follows:

- Memorandum of Understanding
- Training
- The Role of the SRO
- Data collection



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- PSUSD involvement in SRO hiring/interviewing process
- Agreement to have the SROs trained by the National Association of School Resource Officers
- SRO coordinate investigative procedures with school administrators when handling law enforcement related issues.
- Worked with campus administration to keep emergency plans up to date.
- Current MOU runs through June 30, 2024.



"We work closely with security at Palm Springs Unified School District... We enjoy a good working relationship with the school district." – CCPD Chief Crum



TRAINING

- *Foundation of School-Based Law Enforcement*
- Ethics and the SRO
- *The SRO as a Teacher/Guest Speaker and Effective Presentations*
- *Understanding Special Needs Students*
- *The SRO as an Informal Counselor/Mentor*
- Social Media and Cyber Safety
- Understanding the Teen Brain
- Violence and Victimization: Challenges to Child Development
- Sex Trafficking of Youth
- School Law
- *Developing and Supporting Successful Relationships with Diverse Students*
- Effects of Youth Trends and Drugs on the School Culture and Environment
- Threat Response: Preventing Violence in School Settings
- School Safety and Emergency Operations
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design



SRO TRIAD



ITEM 8B

Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Public Safety Committee
May 8, 2023



STAFF REPORT

Subject: Roundtable Discussion of Coachella Valley Crime Trends

Contact: Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director (efelci@cvag.org)

Recommendation: Information

Background: The Public Safety Committee has previously expressed interest in receiving updates on FBI reports as they pertain to Coachella Valley trends. An update that was planned for the February 2023 meeting was continued until the May 2023 meeting. CVAG staff has invited top law enforcement from the local cities to present their analysis to the Public Safety Committee and discuss any changes planned to address the trends.

In January 2023, The Desert Sun published an analysis of the crime data that law enforcement agency report on a monthly basis to the California Department of Justice. Ultimately, the information will be compiled for the FBI's Uniform Crime Report Program. The Desert Sun's analysis reflected data from 2010 through September 2022. The newspaper stated that *"Serious crimes overall were down last year in most of the Coachella Valley, preliminary reports show, but there were more homicides than there had been in at least a decade."*

The Desert Sun's overview is attached, and its full report can be found here: bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats.

Fiscal Analysis: There is no cost to CVAG for this update.

Attachment: Desert Sun analysis of crime trends in the Coachella Valley, January 14, 2023

Desert Sun.

CRIME & COURTS

Some crimes drop, but homicides in Coachella Valley jump in 2022. Here's what police say

Police in the valley investigated 37 deaths as homicides in 2022, up from 31 in 2021.



Christopher Damien

Palm Springs Desert Sun

Published 9:20 a.m. PT Jan. 14, 2023 | Updated 2:48 p.m. PT Jan. 14, 2023

Key Points

Coachella had 11 killings, the most of any city. Desert Hot Springs recorded 7. Palm Springs had 5.

Assaults and burglaries declined, but auto thefts remain a problem.

Editor's note: The Desert Sun is publishing 2022 crime statistics for every city in the Coachella Valley. To see them all, go to bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats.

Serious crimes overall were down last year in most of the Coachella Valley, preliminary reports show, but there were more homicides than there had been in at least a decade.

Like many areas around the nation, the region had seen a rise in violent crime in recent years. The valley's nine cities reported a decade-high 32 homicides in 2019, followed by 30 in 2020 and 31 in 2021. Statistics from law-enforcement agencies, which The Desert Sun verified when possible with the departments, show that trend has accelerated.

Police in the valley investigated 37 deaths as homicides in 2022, though that number could change as investigations continue.

The Desert Sun excluded from that tally fatal traffic collisions that resulted in criminal charges of manslaughter alone, but one crash in Desert Hot Springs that was investigated as a murder is included.

Each law enforcement agency reports crime data monthly to the California Department of Justice for the FBI's Uniform Crime Report Program. The Desert Sun collected and analyzed these reports from every city in the Coachella Valley from 2010 through September 2022, the most recent month in which numbers are available from every city. The police departments won't submit the formal numbers until later in 2023.

The Desert Sun also used available crime reports and an unofficial database of such events kept by the paper to analyze homicides, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries and vehicle thefts throughout the region. Records were gathered from Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Indio and Palm Springs, which have their own police departments. Records for Coachella, Indian Wells, La Quinta, Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage were collected from the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, which provides police services for those cities.

'Ghost guns' and prevention

Police chiefs, elected officials and other law enforcement leaders in many cities discussed what they think is behind the rise in homicides — and what they're doing about it.

Desert Hot Springs finished the year with seven homicides, one more than the year before. Deputy Chief Steven Shaw said that in recent years, the department has seen an increase in seizures of illegal firearms that do not have serial numbers, sometimes referred to as ghost guns. Shootings account for the majority of the homicides in the region.

"Officers are recovering a lot of guns off the street, and most are ghost guns," Shaw said. "A good portion are from folks who have prior records who aren't legally permitted to have firearms."

Coachella ended the year with 11 homicides, the most that city has reported any year since before 2010. The sheriff's department did not respond to inquiries to verify this count.

In an interview, Coachella Mayor Steven Hernandez said the violence has been "very concerning" and expressed his condolences to those who have lost loved ones. He said he was aware of nine of the cases being solved.

"We take this very seriously and provide the resources necessary for justice to be served," he said.

He echoed previous statements he made to The Desert Sun in November, saying the city has considered increasing the number of deputies patrolling. Because several of the victims were

young, including two juveniles, Hernandez said continuing to invest in resources and programs aimed at youth could also help.

"For us, it's really about prevention and intervention, really trying to look at: Are there trends that are festering that we need to address?" Hernandez said. "We need to work on community policing. Perhaps we've really got to think about our social connections, churches, organizations, groups that can help people and guide them through what they're going through. Hopefully, we can continue to create more community love with one another."

Coachella Councilmember Neftali Galarza similarly said the city has focused on providing more opportunities for its youth. He mentioned that the city has arranged for office space to be leased to nonprofits cheaply, providing an opportunity to partner with them to help address related issues.

"Public safety is a number one concern to our residents, and the biggest budget line is policing and public safety," Galarza said. "What is the right solution to solve this? I think it's complicated for public officials and public administrators. I like to believe in more investment in the community, further investment in parks and recreation for youth. We've done a good job of going after grants for these projects."

Coachella is among the valley's cities that contract for police services from the sheriff's department. The department's rising costs have been a topic of debate in recent elections. Galarza said the city is continuing to research creating its own police department, which he and other councilmembers believe could keep the cost of policing down in the long run and provide the community with more control of how it is protected.

La Quinta, another contract city, also saw a rise in homicides, with two in 2022. The two killings are the second most in the last decade behind a five-homicide spike in 2019. Sheriff's Lt. Andy Martinez, who helps coordinate the deputies patrolling La Quinta, noted both suspects were family members of the victims.

"They were relatives of each other, so (those homicides) were not gang-related in any way, or we don't have a serial murderer out running the streets," Martinez told The Desert Sun.

La Quinta also reported the same number of aggravated assaults, 44, through November 2022 that it did in all of 2021. Martinez said aggravated assault statistics typically include domestic violence cases, which make up a "significant portion" of assaults reported in La Quinta.

Cathedral City Police Chief George Crum said he focused resources in 2022 on gang suppression, and as in other cities, he noted a rise in the number of guns seized. That city reported two homicides in 2022, one fewer than the year before.

"If you have some sustained teams focusing on the root problems in our individual cities, you can see some success," Crum said. "The high visibility of patrol officers in areas where we know we see higher numbers of certain crimes, interacting with the communities in those areas, that's a deterrent. When we have a decent, trusting relationship, that helps us solve crimes."

Palm Springs Police Chief Andrew Mills said his department was faced with a concerning string of violent crimes early in 2022, which he focused resources on. The city reported five homicides in 2022, two fewer than the year before.

"We had a lot of gun violence in the first part of the year, 101 felony arrests," Mills said Tuesday. "We took a couple dozen guns off the street. When you take guns off the street, out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them, that makes an impact."

Behind the drops in crime

Throughout the Coachella Valley, aggravated assaults are generally down, with most cities seeing drops from 2021 to 2022.

Indio's 225 assaults in all of 2022, for example, were down more than a third from the prior year's 341. And its reported seven homicides were one fewer than in 2021. Next door in Coachella, even as homicides increased, there were 82 assaults through September, some 30% less than the 130 in all of 2021.

Indio Police Chief Mike Washburn was cautious to credit the improvements in his city to any one effort by the department, except for the hard work of his staff. He noted during an interview Thursday that the department has increased the number of uniformed officers, including motorcycle officers, and code enforcement, while continuing to focus on the need to hire.

"We don't know what we prevent by being visible, but we know it works," Washburn said, noting numbers in almost every crime category are trending down. "We had a concerted effort to bring on more officers, even on overtime, to make sure that we've had the right number that we need on the street. I think it's an increase in visibility."

Burglaries were down in nearly every city, with substantial drops in two. While Palm Springs reported 515 burglaries in 2021, it saw 394 in 2022, according to statistics provided by the department. Palm Desert burglaries similarly dropped from 365 in 2021, to 142 last year.

Mills said the department has stressed the community can be more vigilant about reducing the opportunities for property crimes, such as by not leaving valuables in plain sight and unsecured.

"We arrested a few people who may have had a disproportionate impact, but in many ways the community can protect themselves," Mills said. "We're not going to successfully reduce crime unless we get rid of the opportunity."

Desert Hot Springs reported about 80 burglaries through September 2022, less than half what it has averaged in years prior. Shaw similarly said the department found most of these cases were crimes of opportunity repeated by the same perpetrators. Early in the year, he said, there was a string of home burglaries that officers tied to a group of juveniles.

"We got a call while one was going on, and we had figured out from the previous cases where their getaway route was," Shaw said. "And, sure enough, we got them as they were attempting to flee. It was just good work by the officers at the time."

Coachella reported 65 burglaries in 2021 and 70 through September. But as in the other cities, its rate of burglaries when controlled for population is well down from what it was a decade ago.

In 2010, Palm Springs experienced about 14 burglaries for every 1,000 residents. In 2022, preliminary data shows the rate is nearly half, closer to 7.3. In 2010, Palm Desert experienced about 13 burglaries for every 1,000 residents and now about four. Coachella experienced about 14 burglaries for 1,000 residents in 2010, and, even with a slight rise in 2022, the rate is around two.

Robberies were down or remained at 2021 levels in most of the nine cities, except a marginal rise in La Quinta and a jump in Rancho Mirage from two in 2021 to eight through September of 2022. In Cathedral City, statistics include a spike in robberies, which reports show reflects a different reporting method rather than a major increase in the crime.

Indio saw a significant drop in robberies, from 77 in 2021 to 31 through September. So did Palm Desert, which reported 33 in 2021, and a mere six through September of last year.

"We're enormous believers in community policing," said Indio's chief, Washburn. "An engaged community is a lot more than our eyes and ears. They problem solve for you."

Auto thefts a stubborn problem

Most cities are projecting auto thefts in 2022 that are just slightly lower than the year before. However, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs and Cathedral City are on track to be above the average for the prior few years.

Palm Springs, for example, reported 440 auto thefts in 2021 and 317 through September. Rancho Mirage reported 97 in 2021 and 91 through September. Both are on pace to be slightly below the year prior once final numbers are reported. Indian Wells could have half the year prior's number, with 17 in 2021 and six through September.

Shaw said auto thefts have been a stubbornly persistent regional problem, but added that most vehicles are recovered in the area.

"The vast majority of the cars are being stolen and found in the Coachella Valley," Shaw said. "They take it to get from point A to point B. A lot of times it's older cars that are easy to steal or keys being left in cars."

The Cathedral City chief, Crum, said he was surprised to see certain property crimes falling last year, given that cost of living and inflation has gone up notably, which over his three decades in policing usually correlates with a rise in such offenses.

"We're costing people out of the life they may have lived prior to the pandemic," Crum said. "As people struggle financially, we, as law enforcement officers, should expect a rise in crime as a consequence."

Perception: 'What we're seeing is a swelling insecurity'

Several police and elected officials said residents' reactions to the ups and downs in crime trends have been amplified recently by how quickly information, and sometimes misinformation, is shared. They said constituents often express a belief about crime that might not reflect the actual statistics.

"You can't fight an emotional argument with data," said Mills, the chief in Palm Springs. "Regardless of what the crime data shows, for many people it's their perception that counts, and what we're seeing is a swelling insecurity."

Washburn similarly noted that he speaks with Indio residents about their perceptions of high rates of crimes that aren't backed up by the data the police department has.

"I urge people to report crime if they observe it so we have accurate data," he said. "But also don't get panicked. Tell us about your concerns, and we can provide more information about what we know is going on."

Crum said community engagement is a primary focus for Cathedral City police in 2023. He noted the pandemic made it very difficult to maintain good communication with residents during a pivotal moment in American policing, after murder of George Floyd in Minnesota in May 2020.

"I think that when you go back to May 2020, and the impact Minneapolis had on American policing, it's imperative that we stay connected," Crum said. "We have to address where our profession needs to be transformed to meet the communities we police."

Mills said that during his previous career with the San Diego Police Department, he worked events at the city's stadium, formerly the home of an NFL team. He said his department would make "hundreds of arrests in a two-hour period during some of those events."

"We had about 100,000 people at Pride this last year, and we had zero arrests related to it," Mills said. "People chose to be civil and to be kind to one another. We were safe because people chose to be safe."

Hernandez of Coachella similarly said he believes his city is headed in the right direction, even as homicides have risen, stating crime is generally down from the highs the city experienced in years past.

"We're coming out of a life-changing pandemic and, in many ways, people are disconnected; they're figuring out how to be a community again," Hernandez said.

And several people interviewed echoed that leadership through the transition will be key.

"From Washington, D.C., to local cities, it's really important how we talk to one another," Mills said. "I think you see the numbers tend to drop when the tension is lessened in a community. We in government can help set the level of civility."

Christopher Damien covers public safety and the criminal justice system. He can be reached at christopher.damien@desertsun.com or follow him at [@chris_a_damien](https://twitter.com/chris_a_damien).

The Desert Sun reporter Tom Coulter contributed to this report.

Item 9A

COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
ATTENDANCE RECORD
FY2022-2023

Voting Members	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	ATTENDED		
Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
City of Blythe		○	○		○			●					1	out of	4
City of Cathedral City		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
City of Coachella		○	○		○			●					1	out of	4
City of Desert Hot Springs		●	○		○			●					2	out of	4
City of Indian Wells		●	●		○			○					2	out of	4
City of Indio		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
City of La Quinta		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
City of Palm Desert		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
City of Palm Springs		○	●		●			●					3	out of	4
City of Rancho Mirage		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians		*	*		*			○					0	out of	4
Riverside County		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
Total Attendance Per Meeting		9	9		8			11							

Ex Officio / Non-Voting Members	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	ATTENDED		
Agua Caliente		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
California Highway Patrol		●	●		●			○					3	out of	4
Cathedral City Fire		●	○		●			○					2	out of	4
Cathedral City Police		●	●		●			○					3	out of	4
County Probation Department		●	●		●			○					3	out of	4
Desert Hot Springs Police		○	●		●			●					3	out of	4
District Attorney's Office		○	○		○			○					0	out of	4
Indio Police		●	○		○			●					2	out of	4
Palm Desert Sheriff Station		●	●		○			○					2	out of	4
Palm Springs Fire		●	●		●			●					4	out of	4
Palm Springs Police		●	●		○			●					3	out of	4
Riverside County Fire		○	●		○			●					2	out of	4
Riverside County Sheriff		●	●		○			●					3	out of	4
Thermal Sheriff Station		○	○		○			○					0	out of	4
U.S. Border Patrol		○	○		○			○					0	out of	4
Total Attendance Per Meeting		10	10		7			7							

No Meeting
 Vacant *

Present ●

Absent ○

ITEM 9B

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Public Safety Committee
May 8, 2023**



STAFF REPORT

Subject: Update on the Looming Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

Contact: Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director (efelci@cvag.org)

Recommendation: Information

Background: In December 2022, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) announced it was starting the process to close Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in the City of Blythe, with an anticipated closure in March 2025. The decision coincides with a plan to end its lease at the California City Correctional Facility in Kern County. The looming closure has prompted strong opposition from Blythe city officials, who are extremely concerned about the economic impacts that will result from the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison both in terms of job loss and also on the impact the prison currently has in maintaining facilities for the city.

Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, which opened in 1988, occupies about 125 acres and is adjacent to Ironwood State Prison. Chuckawalla was designed to house for 1,738 inmates but had 2,733 inmates as of 2019, which were the most recent statistics presented on the CDCR website. Chuckawalla includes four Level II Non-Designated Programming Facility Yards and one Level I Non-Designated Programming Facility Yard. The prison also maintains operation of a fire house, water treatment plant, waste water treatment plant, the vehicle maintenance garage, and a recycling and salvage program.

In February 2023, the pending closure was brought forward to CVAG's committees for discussion and consideration of action. At the recommendation of the Public Safety Committee, the Executive Committee directed the CVAG Executive Director to assist the City of Blythe in its request to reexamine and reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison and, if that closure appears to move forward, to advocate for the repurposing of the facility and meaningful mitigation measures.

In recent months, the City of Blythe has worked to increase awareness of the issue and the opposition is intensifying. A "Save Chuck" public education and advocacy campaign has been launched and, in March, State Sens. Steve Padilla and Kelly Seyarto and Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia submitted a joint letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom requesting he reconsider the closure. CVAG also participated in a virtual press conference that was intended to attract statewide attention. Finally, these concerns were also highlighted at the Blythe Community Outlook Conference, which was held at the Palo Verde College on April 6.

A video recap of the City's efforts was provided at April meeting of the CVAG Executive Committee.

Fiscal Analysis: There is no cost to CVAG for this update. Any efforts to support Blythe in its efforts would be covered under existing staff time.

Attachments:

1. CVAG letter of opposition to the planned closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison
2. Link to the Save Chuck campaign: <https://savechuck.org/>
3. Link to video overview of Blythe's concerns:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzkPQEAXGbM>

COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

73-710 Fred Waring Dr., Suite 200, Palm Desert, CA 92260 · (760) 346-1127 · www.cvag.org



March 16, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom Governor
State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe

Dear Governor Newsom:

As the Executive Director of the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, I write in support of the City of Blythe's request that you reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP), which is located in the City of Blythe. Closing CVSP will have devastating negative impacts to the City of Blythe, which is one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in the state, as well as impacts to the Coachella Valley and eastern Riverside County.

The Coachella Valley Association of Governments is a joint powers authority that is made up of the nine Coachella Valley cities, the City of Blythe, four local Tribal Nations and the County of Riverside. As a regional government, CVAG plans, builds and operates projects and programs of regional significance on behalf of its member agencies, to improve the quality of life of residents and visitors. As such, the closure of the CVSP will have devastating direct social and economic impacts to the City of Blythe, the Coachella Valley and the broader area of Riverside County.

Blythe is a small, geographically isolated city located in eastern Riverside County on the border between California and Arizona. Due to their isolated location, many families of incarcerated individuals and prison staff have made Blythe their home. With the current housing crisis it may be incredibly challenging for these individuals and families to afford housing in less affordable areas of the State where the prisons remaining open reside. Also, CVSP is a major employer in Blythe, employing 852 individuals, most of which reside in Blythe and the Coachella Valley. Palo Verde College, located in Blythe, will lose 250 full time equivalent students due to this closure because the college pioneered an inmate education program that has since become a statewide program. Impacts will also be felt at Palo Verde Hospital, which routinely treats patients from CVSP and is the only hospital for 100+ miles.

We strongly urge you reconsider the closure of CVSP and consult with the Cities of Blythe and Norco to arrive a more inclusive and positive solutions to this matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at 760-346-1147 or at tikirk@cvag.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Kirk', is written over a blue horizontal line.

Tom Kirk
Executive Director

cc: Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, A.D. 36
Assemblymember Greg Wallis, A.D. 47
Senator Steve Padilla, S.D. 18
Senator Kelly Seyarto, S.D. 32



ITEM 9C

Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Public Safety Committee
May 8, 2023



STAFF REPORT

Subject: Update on Efforts to Regulate Mylar Balloons

Contact: Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director (efelci@cvag.org)

Recommendation: Information

Background: Over the course of several meetings last year, the Public Safety Committee was provided updates on the increasing public safety concerns related to Mylar balloons and power outages. The issue, which has drawn attention from both Southern California Edison (SCE) and Imperial Irrigation District (IID), involves conversations around limiting the sale or possession of Mylar balloons. This led to CVAG taking a position on statewide legislation seeking to regulate the issue. In November 2022, CVAG staff sought direction on pursuing a model ordinance that limits the sale and/or possession of Mylar balloons in order to address power outages in the Coachella Valley. At the time, the Public Safety Committee did not take a position on the model ordinance but rather requested staff continue to track the issue.

On April 13, 2023, the Palm Desert City Council discussed potential city regulations of Mylar balloons. Palm Desert city staff is now drafting an ordinance that, if approved, would ban Mylar balloons in Palm Desert's parks. The ordinance will be presented for Council's consideration at a future meeting. In the interim, City staff has reached out to CVAG staff about renewing discussions around a regional approach to banning the sale of Mylar balloons, and specifically requested that the issue be brought to the Energy & Environmental Resources Committee. Because this issue had previously originated with the Public Safety Committee, CVAG staff is providing the Committee this update and will continue tracking the City's conversations. Should a ban or any similar regulations be implemented locally, CVAG staff will bring them forward to both the Public Safety and the Energy & Environmental Resources Committees for direction on any regional considerations.

Mylar balloons are made with Mylar nylon, a non-biodegradable material, and are typically coated with a metallic finish that conducts electricity. These balloons are a common feature at celebratory events such as birthdays or graduations, and they stay inflated for two weeks or longer. When they are not sufficiently weighted and are released into the air, Mylar balloons have the potential to contact power lines, which can result in power outages and fires.

Since 1990, California has prohibited the release of Mylar balloons into the air in an effort to help reduce power outages. Additional legislative efforts have sought to limit the manufacture or sale of celebratory foil balloons. In June 2022, based on the direction and recommendation of the Public Safety Committee, the CVAG Executive Committee issued support for Assembly Bill 847, authored by Assemblymember Bill Quirk (D-Hayward), which aimed to impose additional regulations to govern the manufacture or sale of celebratory foil balloons. The version of AB 847 that was signed by the Governor was amended after CVAG's committees endorsed it. Whereas the bill initially aimed to ban the sale of Mylar balloons in

2026 if they cannot pass certain standards and requirements, the final version has a much longer phase-out that will start no sooner than January 2027 and could extend past 2031.

Fiscal Analysis: There is no cost to CVAG for this informational update. The development of a model ordinance can be covered under existing staff time, should the Public Safety Committee or the Energy & Environmental Resources Committee endorse a regional approach to addressing Mylar balloons.