

PHILADELPHIA CRIMINAL INN OF COURT

PANEL DISCUSSION ON POLICING IN PHILADELPHIA

By: Scott P. Sigman, Esquire*

On Thursday, March 19, 2026, in Philadelphia's 126 year old City Hall, the Philadelphia Criminal Inn of Court hosted a panel discussion on "Policing in Philadelphia."



The pre-panel reception catered by Philadelphia's historic Reading Terminal Market was held in Room 600, the ornate, two story City Hall Law Library. During the reception, there was a lively discussion led by Philadelphia City Councilman Jim Harity. The Councilman shared his deeply personal story of addiction and recovery and his current initiatives for the opioid ravaged Kensington section of Philadelphia. In this one particular section of Philadelphia, known for "Zombies" (people aimlessly wondering the streets high on heroin/fentanyl with open wounds caused by the animal tranquilizer xylazine that is often mixed with the fentanyl) the opioid crisis has led to an increase in gun violence claiming the lives of over 500 people a year in the City in 2022. Shockingly, 1 in 4 shootings in Philadelphia took place in

Kensington, an area that has been called the "largest open air drug market in America" by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The Inn then moved to the stately Orphans' Court Courtroom 425 for the panel discussion led by Inn Executive Committee member Scott Sigman, Esquire. The distinguished panel included Deputy Philadelphia Police Commissioners Frank Vanore, Michael Cram, Francis Healy, and Pedro Rosario. The panelists were also joined by Philadelphia Police Forensic Crime Lab Director Edward Dugan. Deputy Commissioner Healy led the discussion with his uniquely qualified perspective on "law enforcement under the rule of law" since he is a sworn policeman and an attorney.



Following Commissioner Healy was Police Commissioner Pedro Rosario, who is the first Latino deputy commissioner in the history of Philadelphia. Commissioner Rosario discussed his plan to address the crime and drug addiction epidemic in Kensington. Commissioner Rosario explained how the police were surging resources into the area and partnering with local, state, and

federal organizations. He described how specially trained officers in the East Service Detail were given access to an outreach resource hub with direct contacts in the Philadelphia Fire Department (which includes EMS) and the Philadelphia Health Department to provide on-the-scene medics. The police are also working with specialists in addiction and recovery who come to the scene to provide outreach and counseling services while conducting welfare checks for unsheltered people.

Although Kensington has a higher share of homicides, city wide gun violence is specifically being handled by Deputy Commissioner Frank Vanore. Commissioner Vanore outlined his strategy to centralize the detectives investigating shootings into the Shooting Investigation Group (SIG) alongside the homicide unit at police headquarters. Prior to this move, shootings were handled by detectives assigned to various police divisions throughout the city. If the shooting victim died, the case was then sent to the centralized homicide unit where specialized detectives would need to start the investigation from scratch. Instead, Commissioner Vanore is dramatically improving the clearance rate (the rate of a successful investigation leading to an arrest) by assigning the almost 1,800 yearly non-fatal shootings to the SIG Unit alongside the homicide unit inside police headquarters.

Following Commissioner Vanore, was Deputy Commissioner Michael Cram, who serves as the commanding officer in charge of Patrol Operations. He is responsible for all the Officers assigned to the 20 Patrol Districts that cover the entire City of Philadelphia. In this position, Commissioner Cram developed and implemented strategies to increase public safety and improve community relationships. In particular, Commissioner Cram told the group about his initiative to handle the problem with illegal ATV's and motor bikes.

Lastly, Philadelphia Forensic Crime Lab Director Edward Dugan provided an update on advances at the lab and the lab's upcoming move to a state of the art facility near the University of Pennsylvania. In particular, Director Dugan explained how the lab was reducing the DNA backlog by prioritizing certain cases. He also spoke about new equipment being used in the controlled substance chemistry lab, firearms identification unit (ballistics lab), DNA lab, and latent prints lab. He further explained that while the new lab in West Philadelphia is obtaining certification, the City will continue to operate the old lab in North Philadelphia.



This Inn is a combination of Assistant District Attorneys, Public Defenders, Private Criminal Defense Attorneys, and First Judicial District Criminal Division Judges all working in the Philadelphia Criminal Courts along with students from Drexel University Kline School of Law.

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