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A MONEY PIT

***Feeding cops and lawyers is very expensive.
Little is left for prevention.***



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. It's not really in the "Hollywood" of movie lore. Located in the somewhat dodgy East Hollywood business district, about two miles southeast of L.A.'s cinematic hub, "[The Vermont Hollywood](#)" is a large, popular nightclub that regularly hosts notable hip-hop and reggae artists. And during the early morning hours of July 19, it had just wrapped a performance of "[Riddim](#)" music by "[Sanzu + Homies](#)" when an unimaginably shocking event took place.



That tragedy has received national coverage, but let's summarize what's presently known. Not long before its two a.m. closing time, [the club ejected](#) a reportedly unruly patron. Fernando Ramirez, 29 (left image) didn't take it lightly. He promptly walked off and fetched his car. And as the club emptied and patrons lined the sidewalk, he barreled his vehicle through the crowd. Yes, there is [video](#) (beware its grisly content.)

Ramirez didn't get far – he promptly ran over several large food carts and his car dragged to a stop. Bystanders quickly rushed in and grabbed him. One of them shot Ramirez in the back, then fled. That man is yet to be identified, but police released a [picture](#) (right image) that depicts the shooter gripping what seems to be a small gun in his right hand.



Amazingly, no one – not even Ramirez – was killed. According to police, "at least 36 victims [the count soon became 37] sustained injuries ranging from minor pain to serious fractures and lacerations. Several individuals were struck by the vehicle and some were briefly trapped." News reports indicate that about two-dozen victims wound up in the hospital. On July 22nd, [the Los Angeles County D.A. charged Ramirez](#) with 37 counts of attempted murder and 37 counts of non-firearm ADW. Each of the latter

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carries a “[special allegation](#)” of committing an offense while pending prior charges, and eight carry special allegations of causing “great bodily injury.”

California has the death penalty. However, in 2019 Governor Gavin Newsom issued an [executive order](#) that reprieved all who had been sentenced to death and essentially prohibited the death penalty’s future imposition. Of course, should Ramirez be convicted, the enormity of the deed means he would never be freed. This wasn’t Ramirez’s first go-round with the criminal law. According to the D.A.’s [news release](#), Ramirez was on bail for a domestic violence case when he went on his rampage. [A comprehensive analysis](#) by the *Los Angeles Times* indicates that eleven criminal cases had been filed against Ramirez during the preceding eleven years in Orange County Superior Court (his new case is in Los Angeles County.) Here are the three major examples we found in [O.C. court files](#):

| Orange Co. Superior Court case #14CF2339 | | | | |
|--|--|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Offense Date | Charges | Disposition | | |
| | | Date | Action | Sent. |
| 6/25/14 | Aggravated assault, gang-related battery | 12/10/14 | Pled guilty | 1 yr. jail, 5 yrs. prob. |
| 2/10/15 | Probation viol. | 3/18/15 | Violated | 84 days jail |
| 6/17/15 | Probation viol. | 8/4/15 | Violated | 2 yrs. prison |

| Orange Co. Superior Court case #19HF0780 | | | | |
|--|--|-------------|----------------|--|
| Offense Date | Charges | Disposition | | |
| | | Date | Action | Sent. |
| 6/15/19 | Battery w/serious injury, hate crime, civil rights violation | 10/17/19 | Trial - guilty | 4 yrs. prison for battery, 2 yrs. hate cr. |

| Orange Co. Superior Court case #22HF0279 | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Offense Date | Charges | Disposition | | |
| | | Date | Action | Sent. |
| 1/28/22 | Domestic battery w/injury | 2/25/22 | Released on \$20,000 bail | Case contested, remains pre-trial |
| 1/28/22 | Violation of protective order | 2/25/22 | | |

Ramirez's 2019 tangle is of special interest. According to [news accounts](#), he had, without provocation, accosted and punched a supermarket worker, breaking the man's nose and two front teeth. His victim was Black, [and race was the "reason"](#) that Ramirez gave the officer who took him to jail. But an appellate judge found that Ramirez had not been advised of his *Miranda* rights, thus rendering his "justification" for the assault inadmissible. That invalidated his two-year term for a hate crime, which was to run consecutively, and he was released after serving "[less than a year and a half](#)" for felony battery. Then came the domestic battery case. Ramirez posted bail, and the matter remains in litigation (it's been over three years.) At the time of the nightclub assault, [he also reportedly had a pending DUI](#).

Posts in our [Bail and Sentence Reform special topic](#) regularly bemoan the unseemly, revolving-door nature of the criminal justice process, allowing chronic offenders to quickly resume their predations (see, for example, "[Catch and Release](#)".) Ramirez might not have even been "on the street" but for the prolonged legal struggle over his 2022 case. That matter, which remains unresolved, has gone through [at least eight preliminary hearings](#). Vigorous defense work also led to the successful appeal of the 2019 hate-crime enhancement, thus enabling his early release.

On the other hand, it's not as though Martinez's transgressions were ignored. Misconduct while on probation led to his first term of imprisonment, in 2015. And that 2019 hate crime case, which brought on another prison term, was by all indications vigorously pursued. Yet all this official attention ultimately proved ineffective. That brings us to this outtake from "[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)":

...no matter how well it's done, policing is clearly not the ultimate solution. Preventing violence is a task for society. As we've repeatedly pitched, a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities, language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing could yield vast benefits.

Well, that sounds great. Still, while feeding cops, lawyers and correctional officers is, per our subtitle, frightfully expensive, it's all paid straight out of our tax dollars. In contrast, preventive and curative work is largely supported by citizen groups and private donors. By *charity*. Yes, in past times the U.S. Government *did* pitch in. But violence-intervention grants [have apparently fallen victim to the same fiscal massacre](#) that recently wiped out a host of ostensibly enlightened, Federally-funded programs. Consider, for example, DOJ's highly vaunted, neighborhood-centered "[community violence intervention](#)" program. In 2022 and 2023 it awarded almost \$200 million to

eighty-five communities. But that effort is now history; indeed, its home page has been “archived” (click [here](#) for our saved version.)



Two notoriously violence-beset places offer examples of how localities have addressed such things, and mostly on their own. [Oakland's version](#) of a long-established gun-violence prevention strategy, [Project Ceasefire](#), uses data and outreach teams “to identify the 250 to 350 individuals driving violent crime at any given time.” They’re then “targeted” with “enforcement and services” (emphasis ours.) Oakland

Ceasefire draws its funds from a host of sources, including the city, charitable organizations, and (at least until recently) the Feds. In Chicago, a like effort, [the “Peacekeepers” program](#), deploys selected, trained inhabitants to discover and mediate conflicts before the shooting starts. Focused on troubled neighborhoods, it’s funded from the city’s own coffers, by the state, and by private organizations.



Ceasefire has been credited with helping to stem the bloodshed in Oakland; along the way, it’s also supposedly reduced property crime. Chicago’s “peacekeepers” have also supposedly proven successful. Natch, as [the recent wounding of several of its workers](#) demonstrates, there truly remains “a long way to go.”

Back to Mr. Ramirez. While his earlier behavior was clearly problematic, keeping him perpetually locked up was clearly out of reach. Whether he might have been susceptible to the blandishments of ceasefire teams or “peacekeepers” we can’t say. But our failure to seriously address the human problems that get spawned in poverty-stricken, unruly places insures that the mayhem will continue on its unimpeded course.

There will be many more “Vermonts.”