MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairs, Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety
Chairs, House of Appropriations Committee on Justice and Public Safety
Chairs, Senate Appropriations Committee on Justice and Public Safety

FROM: Eddie M. Buffaloe, Jr., Secretary
Timothy D. Moose, Chief Deputy Secretary

RE: *Gangs in North Carolina -Trends and Analysis (2022 Report)*

DATE: February 22, 2022

Pursuant to G.S 20-196.5, please find attached *Gangs in North Carolina – Trends and Analysis (2022 Report)*. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.
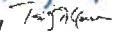
GANGS IN NORTH CAROLINA

2021-22

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE UNIT
NORTH CAROLINA GANGNET
FEBRUARY, 2022

Tony Taylor, Director
Dylan Shepherd, Investigative Supervisor – Intelligence
Jennifer Holste, GangNet Investigator
Jennifer Harmon, GangNet Investigator
Megan Hayes, Administrative Specialist
Marissa Janusz, Investigative Analyst

Preface:

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Special Operations and Intelligence Unit (SOIU) within the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice is responsible for operational procedures and the processing of intelligence for the Division that impacts the general public, staff and offenders under the authority of the Division.

In addition, the section's responsibilities include identifying appropriate goals, objectives, standards, strategies and technologies used; coordinating and directing activities of both Prison and Community Corrections staff, and overseeing the collection, analysis and sharing of intelligence information.

SOIU is also responsible for monitoring and managing offenders who have been identified as having affiliations with Security Risk Groups (SRG). The unit provides training to Division staff, law enforcement agencies and maintains databases used to track and identify gang members who are incarcerated and/or under supervision within our communities. The unit is responsible for establishing procedures to gather, monitor, coordinate and track intelligence information necessary to counter planned criminal activities by offenders and to manage SRG efforts. As of July 2020, SOIU became the primary administrative authority for the North Carolina GangNet database which allows the section to manage and track gang related intelligence both inside and outside of corrections. This merger also allows for a more centralized location for all the state's gang intelligence.

Gang research in North Carolina began in 1997 by the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center (NCCJAC) of the Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) which conducted surveys and produced reports. In the early 2000's, additional funding provided several large metropolitan agencies in North Carolina the opportunity to use GangNet. Since 2009, GangNet has been the overall source of gang intelligence and reports for the General Assembly. Session Law 2008-187 Section 7 states that the Governor's Crime Commission was to submit an annual update to the General Assembly on statewide levels of gangs, gang membership and gang associates in North Carolina. Prior to 2020, GangNet was managed by the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, which initiated a Field Liaison (FLO) program throughout the state. The program allowed for expansion and training of GangNet to law enforcement users across the state. In 2021, the Special Operations and Intelligence Unit established several new projects, created new positions and developed additional policies and procedures.

Scope and Methodology:

The United States Department of Justice defines a gang as:

> *"(1) an association of three or more individuals; (2) whose members collectively identify themselves by adopting a group identity which they use to create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation frequently by employing one or more of the following: a common name, slogan, identifying sign, symbol, tattoo or other physical marking, style or color of clothing, hairstyle, hand sign or graffiti; (3) the association's purpose, in part, is to engage in criminal activity and the association uses violence or intimidation to further its criminal objectives; (4) its members engage in criminal activity, or acts of juvenile delinquency that if committed by an adult would be crimes; (5) with the intent to enhance or preserve the association's power, reputation, or economic resources; (6) the association may also possess some of the following characteristics: (a) the members employ rules for joining and operating within the association; (b) the members meet on a recurring basis; (c) the association provides physical protection of its members from other criminals and gangs; (d) the association seeks to exercise control over a particular location or region, or it may simply defend its perceived interests against rivals; or (e) the association has an identifiable structure. (7) this definition is not intended to include traditional organized crime groups such as La Cosa Nostra, groups that fall within the Department's definition of "international organized crime," drug trafficking organizations or terrorist organizations."*

GangNet is a web-based platform and database which is managed by the NCDPS Special Operations and Intelligence Unit. In accordance with federal intelligence guidelines, all information is housed on a secure server. Users must be employed in a law enforcement capacity and further be certified to enter or view information contained within the database. Certification includes thorough knowledge of the laws and protocols required for gang member entry. Once entered, GangNet allows certified officers and agencies the ability to share non-discoverable and non-evidentiary information on validated gang members and affiliates.

Reporting functions allow for analysis of both gang data and certified user data. This report primarily focuses on data for calendar year 2021, which was analyzed by SOIU GangNet staff in February of 2022. All reported data contained herein, is derived from both GangNet and SOIU internal databases.

Executive Summary:

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Special Operations and Intelligence Unit intends to continue to expand the use of the statewide GangNet database through continued training and promotion. Continued changes will allow for more accurate data analyzation, resulting in increased knowledge of trends and reduction techniques among current members. Throughout this report, we will discuss and review our accomplishments for 2021, trends and goals for 2022 with appropriate recommendations.

Goals for 2021: Recap

The goals for 2021 included several simultaneous processes to clean up current data, restrict user ability to enter inconsistent information, expand user knowledge and expand overall users within the database.

Throughout the year, the SOIU Intelligence Section added three new positions to their GangNet section; Megan Hayes, Administrative Specialist; Jennifer Holste, GangNet Investigator; Jennifer Harmon, GangNet Investigator.

Megan Hayes began her career with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety in March of 2020 as an Administrative Associate for the Office of the Deputy Secretary, Division of Adult Corrections and Juvenile Justice. In February of 2021, she joined the Special Operations and Intelligence Unit as the GangNet Administrative Specialist. With a background in administration, she works alongside the Special Operations Investigation Supervisor to manage the intelligence section of SOIU in daily functions. Megan holds an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice Technology from Wake Technical Community College and is currently working towards a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice with a concentration in Administration at Western Carolina University.

Jennifer Harmon has a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Old Dominion University, a Juris Doctorate from Appalachian School of Law, as well as a professional certificate in Dispute Resolution/Arbitration from Humboldt University in Berlin. Jennifer's capstone research on Gender Disparity in Criminal Offenses Among Persons of High IQ was published in the International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology. Before joining NCDPS, Jennifer worked many other law enforcement positions including NYC Patrol Officer, NYC Intel Probation Officer and was a founding officer of the Cyber Intelligence Unit in New York City. Currently, Jennifer is assigned to the Special Operations and Intelligence Unit as a Criminal Investigator for GangNet.

Jenni Holste has a Bachelor of Science in Sociology and Criminology from Florida Southern College as well as a Master of Science in Criminal Justice from Armstrong Atlantic State University. She began her career with the Department of Public Safety as a Probation Parole

Officer in 2012 specializing as a Security Risk Group Intelligence Officer conducting investigations and validations as well as supervising Validated Offenders. In 2019, she was promoted to Chief Probation Parole Officer where she supervised SRG Intelligence Officers. Jenni transitioned to the Special Operations and Intelligence Unit in 2021 as a Criminal Investigator for GangNet. Additionally, Jenni has been a member of the North Carolina Gang Investigators Association since 2015 where she was the Region 1 Coordinator until being voted in as Vice President of Administration in 2021.

Accomplishments for 2021: Policy and Procedure, Training, Communication, Partnerships.

- Policy and Procedure: New policy was developed to ensure uniformity across all agencies and users within North Carolina. Additionally, standardized digital forms were implemented to better manage both current and new users. With digitization, new databases were developed to hold secure information. By adding certificates of completion, new users and administration can document completion of advanced training.
- Training: SOIU held 35 training classes in 2021 to add 332 new users to GangNet. These trainings were conducted at local community colleges throughout the state, local departments and in cooperation with North Carolina Gang Investigators Association (NCGIA). In addition to the 62 counties in North Carolina that utilize GangNet, 13 new counties are now represented. Last year, SOIU also began to work with the North Carolina Justice Academy to develop an online GangNet training for new users available through their platform.
- Communication: Three new email distribution lists were created to enhance gang intelligence sharing across the state. In total, 2,547 law enforcement officials were added to receive alerts, notifications and intelligence products. Additionally, a GangNet proxy email was created to help users with administrative requests.
- Partnerships: Throughout 2021, SOIU partnered with several outside agencies to promote increased usage and knowledge of the validation process. This included a booth at the NCGIA annual Gang Investigator Conference which included over 400 law enforcement personnel. GangNet Investigators were represented at the Jail Administrators Conference and the Investigative Supervisor was a guest speaker at the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation Field Liaison Conference.
  - Agency Assistance: GangNet Investigators recognized a need for assistance to smaller agencies in gang validation. In response, SOIU developed a validation assistance packet which can be used to assist agencies in developing their own policies and procedures in accordance with General Statute. Investigators met with these agencies and worked hands-on to mentor and accomplish agency needs.
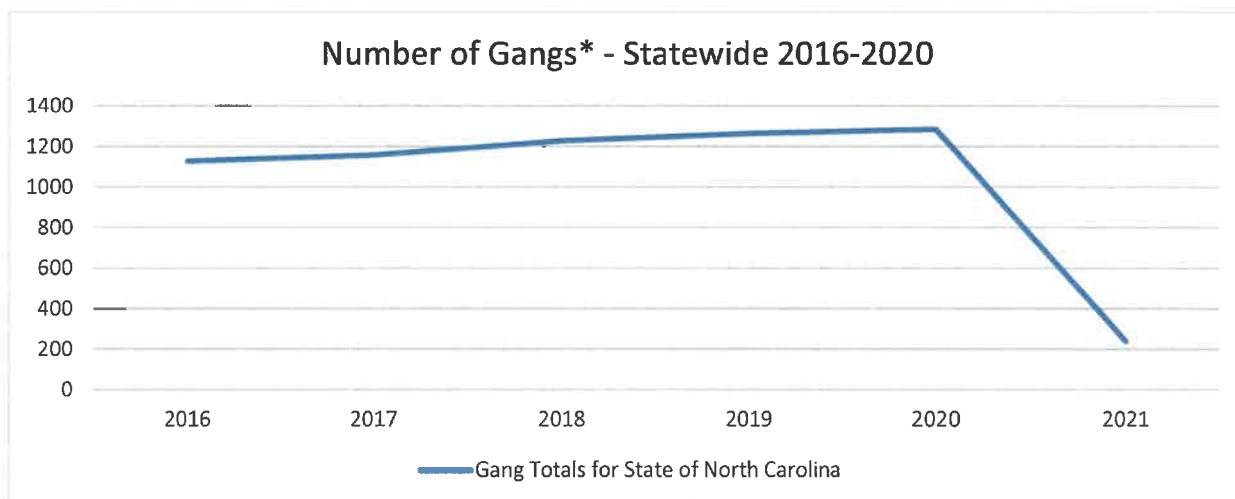
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Trends:

Data is analyzed along several data points for the individual jurisdictions and across the entire state. GangNet reports include those for number of gangs, individual member totals, totals by county or region, member age, member race/ethnicity and law enforcement usage. Numbers only reflect the jurisdictions trained to enter information, rather than view only. Also, GangNet does not produce historical reports and only represents the totals at the time the report was run, in this case February 2022.

In the early part of 2021, administrators worked to clean up old or inconsistent data. This included combining duplicate gangs and removing those that had zero members. In total, 761 gangs were removed from the database. Based on federal regulation, if information is not updated every five years, that information will be automatically purged from the system. This means that gang members are deleted, but duplicate gangs remain. This data scrub was done in an effort to clean up unnecessary data so that accurate numbers are displayed going forward.

Gang Totals:

Reports obtained from GangNet data reporting in February of 2022 shows a total of 237 gangs reported across the state. *The large decline below is related to data consolidation and not an indication of a reduction in total gangs or members.* **Figure 1**

237 gangs remain active with 3 or more members in the GangNet database.

Analyzation: A gang is determined by those who maintain a membership of more than three (3) members. Prior to 2021, historical gang information maintained in the GangNet system was determined by users from various jurisdictions. Rises in the number of gangs statewide can be attributed to several factors. Users previously had the ability to add new gangs based on their location or any different attributes they determined. This means that duplicates of the same gang were often entered from one end of the state to the other, regardless of their common
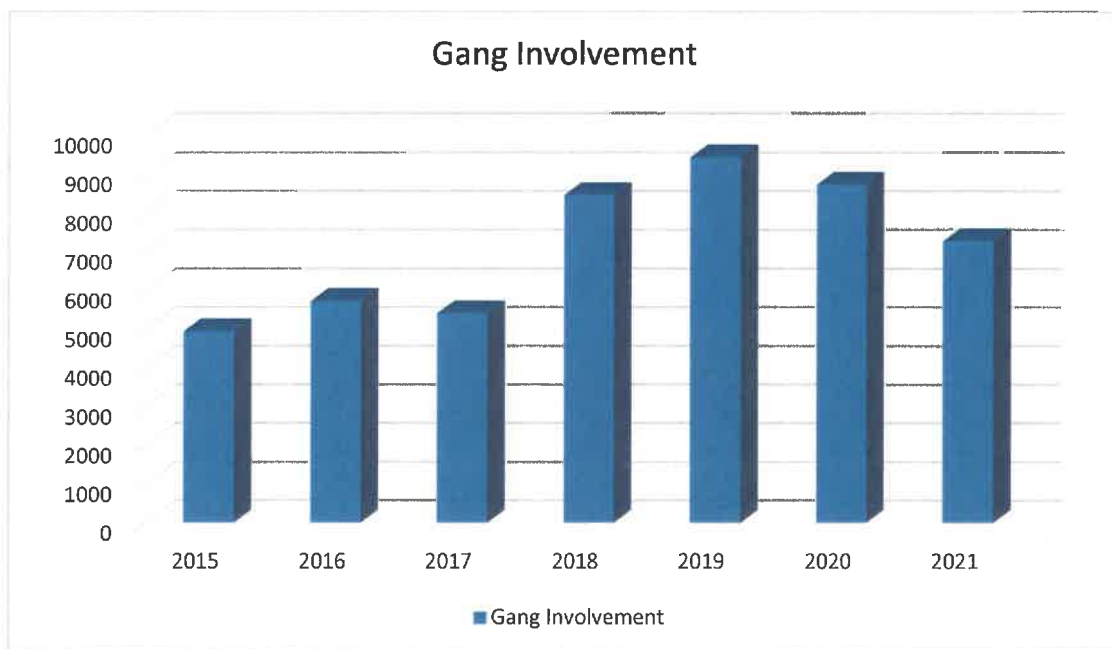
name and hierarchy. Due to the changes made by SOIU, 761 inactive gangs were purged from the system due to a lack in membership data and the remaining were merged correspondingly with the same gang across multiple jurisdictions. These changes in membership data can be attributed to several different factors; Including data that has aged beyond the 5 years of retention and agencies who may have stopped entering or updating records within the state system.

Recommendations: Special Operations and Intelligence Unit has been working to consolidate these numbers across the state and train users the value of consistent data. Once most agencies have successfully completed new entry level courses, future reports will show accurate increases in numbers across the state. Furthermore, restricting user's ability to enter new gangs will allow administrators an opportunity to verify whether those gangs are in fact new. Additionally, by restricting a user's ability to input new gangs or gang types means that individual jurisdictions must communicate and share intelligence with neighboring agencies to get a better understanding of the overall gang picture in their area. Ultimately, this will allow for a more thorough and robust database.

Membership Totals: Figure 2

Analyzation: Total gang member numbers are currently determined by the number of jurisdictions that have trained input users. Fluctuations in gang member involvement over the last 5 years are not an accurate representation of state trends and data may not be interpreted accurately based on the input inconsistencies. Fluctuations in the number of users inputting data have a significant impact on the overall interpretation of current numbers. Since GangNet
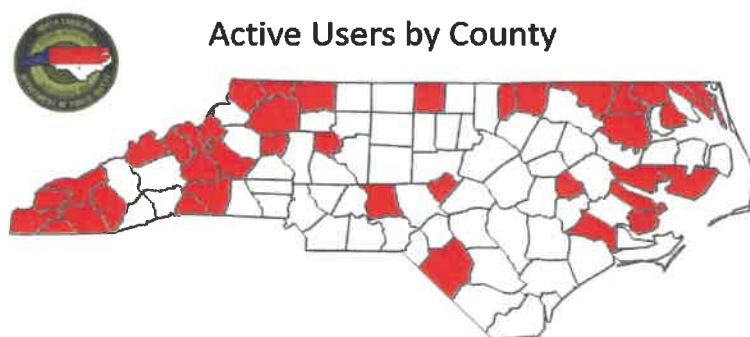
was not developed to generate aggregate reports on numbers of gangs or gang members, this data is the product of programming applied to the data which produces counts for that specific day. A decline in members for 2015 was due to an automated system wide purge of GangNet data.
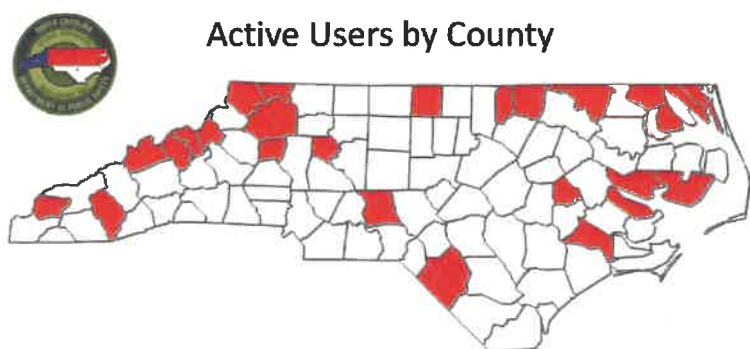
Recommendation: Additional training for entry level users will be required to increase overall usage and input of data. Currently, SOIU is working with the GangNet vendor to add several new processes which will allow DPS and other agencies to upload bulk data. This topic is discussed more in the recommendations section below.

GangNet Usage:

Figure 5: 2021 vs. 2022

Active Users by County

Analyzation: These maps consist of counties with no active users, represented in red from calendar year 2021. The next map shows the addition of 13 counties, bringing the total to 75.

Active Users by County

332 new users were added in calendar year 2021 in 35 total classes across the state.

Goals for 2022: Training, Partnerships and Vendor Upgrades

- Training: SOIU hopes to build on the success of 2021 and add users to the 25 additional counties to ensure all 100 counties are represented. Through partnering with the North Carolina Justice Academy, online classes will begin in calendar year 2022. These classes will allow for an increase in users without constraint from physical classrooms. This will allow GangNet Trainers to focus solely on entry level training to ensure accurate data.

- Partnerships: SOIU intends to partner with NCGIA to have as many certified law enforcement as possible attend the Basic and Advanced Gang Investigator Course. To accomplish this, trainers have begun utilizing those courses to include entry level GangNet. Additional goals include standardizing validation packets for agencies that are unfamiliar with or currently not validating gang members within their jurisdictions. SOIU intends to be represented at multiple law enforcement conferences to include, the Gang Investigators Conference, Jail Administrators Conference, Field Liaisons Conference, and will be guest speaking at the North Carolina Probation/Parole Association Conference.
- Vendor Upgrades: During the previous year, and at the request of SOIU, the GangNet vender GDIT began upgrading several systems. These upgrades include an enhanced system bridge which will allow all validated gang member packets from The Department of Public Safety to automatically transfer to GangNet. Additionally, bulk uploads from other agencies will be possible to help decrease the time required to enter new members. Additional contact methods for all trained staff and those who may expire in the near future will also be established. Currently, there is no automatic renewal or notice of account expiration in GangNet.