

New Orleans Prosecutions to Be Reviewed

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NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Louisiana's attorney general said Thursday he would review up to 10 years worth of homicide and violent crime cases handled by the New Orleans district attorney's office in hopes of improving prosecutions and stemming the city's spiraling murder rate.

Attorney General Charles Foti's announcement came two days after District Attorney Eddie Jordan's office dismissed charges against a suspect in last summer's grisly slaying of five teenagers, saying a witness had disappeared. A day later police held a news conference featuring that very witness.

Foti said he would look at cases dating as far back as 10 years, if the records were readily available, meaning he could look at cases handled under both Jordan, who took office in 2003, and his predecessor, longtime District Attorney Harry Connick.

Foti said he hoped to have preliminary results of the review by the end of August.

"It's not an indictment on everybody, it's to say, 'What do we need to do, both on the city's part, the state's part, the criminal justice system's part, to build the best homicide bureau in the country?'" Foti said. He said he expects to work closely with the district attorney's office.

Dalton Savvoir, a spokesman for Jordan's office, said, "We welcome any investigation by the state attorney general's office and we feel we can stand up on our records."

On Tuesday, Jordan's office dropped charges against a suspect arrested in the fatal shooting of five New Orleans teenagers last year, described by police as the city's worst mass killing in a decade and one that prompted the state to beef up police patrols with National Guard soldiers. Prosecutors said a key but uncooperative witness had disappeared.

On Wednesday, the witness was at a police news conference saying she was willing to testify. Police Superintendent Warren Riley, in dueling news conferences, disagreed on whether Jordan's office did enough to inform police about the difficulties with witnesses.

Jordan's office said charges still could be brought against Anderson in the multiple killings and that the investigation was continuing.

Dismissal of charges against Anderson came less than two weeks after charges were dismissed in another high-profile murder case, again involving an uncooperative witness in the death of musician Dinerral Shavers.

There have been 100 murders in New Orleans this year, part of a violent crime trend that has complicated the city's sluggish recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

"There are always going to be problems with high profile cases," said Rafael Goyeneche, president of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, a local watchdog group. "If the police chief and district attorney can't pick up the phone and work through these problems, I wonder what chance we have to deal with our crime problems."

Associated Press writer Mary Foster contributed to this story.



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