

Federal agents, resources committed to fight violent crime in ABQ

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US Attorney John Anderson speaks about the Department of Justice's Operation Relentless Pursuit which will send federal agents and resources to combat violent crime in Albuquerque. (Elise Kaplan/Albuquerque Journal)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Attorney General William Barr said Wednesday that he will send federal agents and resources to combat crime in seven of the country's most violent cities, Albuquerque among them.

The initiative, Operation Relentless Pursuit, will take place in Albuquerque, Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, Memphis and Milwaukee. In a news conference held in Detroit and streamed online, Barr pointed out that Albuquerque's violent crime rate is 3.7 times the national average and its aggravated assault rate is four times the national average. With a little less than two weeks left in the year, there have been 77 homicides, five more than the highest number in recent history.

"We selected these cities based on a number of factors — obviously the level of violent crime — but we also assessed our local partners," Barr said. "It's very important to us whether we had local partners that are effective and work well with our joint task forces. So we assessed the police forces, the sheriffs, as well as the District Attorney's Office, and based on that matrix we selected these cities."

The operation will include a surge of federal agents from the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Marshals Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, as well as \$71 million in grant funding distributed among the cities to be used to hire officers, pay overtime and benefits, finance task force officers, and purchase equipment and technology, according to a news release.

In a local news conference held after Barr's announcement, officials said they did not yet know how much of the funding nor how many agents will come to Albuquerque.

U.S. Attorney for New Mexico John Anderson said part of the operation will include continuing to prosecute offenders, especially those charged with gun crimes, in federal court. He said federal authorities will be "targeting and identifying the most violent actors in our community and looking at them for enforcement."

Earlier in the year, the Department of Justice held Operation Triple Beam in Albuquerque — a three-month operation that arrested people wanted on warrants throughout the city. Anderson said the new Operation Relentless Pursuit will involve federal agents and task forces actively investigating new cases.

He said that, after a period of months, the Department of Justice will check in with local agencies on how long the operation should last.

"The point that I want to underscore that I think drives Relentless Pursuit is that we are not looking for a short Band-Aid type solution that is going to lower violent crime rates in the short term and then allow them to come back," Anderson said. "We're looking for a long-term sustainable drop."