

Shouldn't we use law-enforcement money to fight actual crime?

written by Charles Munsey | August 18, 2021



By Charles M . . . With the recent increase in violent crime in some areas of Gainesville, FL, and in light of recent law enforcement activity there, a question must be asked: Is the money allotted for law enforcement being used wisely? Recently friends of mine in Gainesville had nine law enforcement officials, including U.S. Marshalls, probation officers, and other law enforcement officials, enter their home one evening at 9:30 to conduct a house search. This was for a couple where the 80-year-old husband had been slowly developing frontotemporal dementia over a period of years before committing a criminal offense.

According to a study published in JAMA Neurology in January of 2015, more than a third of the people in the study with FTD acted out with criminal behaviors. The National Institute of Health in "Neurodegeneration Behind Bars: From Molecules to Jurisprudence" found that "FTD can early on hinder cognition

and predisposes its victims to criminal violations. FTD is challenging because patients often retain the appreciation of right and wrong yet may be “organically incapable to act accordingly.” Florida statutes do not allow courts to consider dementia, even when, as in the case of my friend, the diagnosis is supported with a brain MRI showing atrophy of the brain cells in the frontal lobe, along with a three-hour cognitive evaluation performed by a neuropsychologist used by UF Health of Jacksonville showing cognitive decline in many areas, including judgment.

The night of the search, the first individual to enter the home loudly announced, “U.S. Marshalls entering!” This SWAT-team-style search was done for an elderly man who was a Naval officer and a pilot for over 24 years, a man who served three tours in the Vietnam War in battle, a man who then spent twelve and a half years working for the U.S. government in computer security and software application, and a man with a master’s degree who is now performing barely on a third-grade level. Additionally, a civil court with jurisdiction over Alachua County declared him incapacitated. The nine individuals performing the search are not to be blamed for what I consider a waste of law enforcement money. These men and women were courteous and professional in their interactions with my friends and were only doing what their superiors told them to do. My friends tell me that the Gainesville and Alachua County law enforcement officials are excellent examples for other departments in the state to follow. The problem lies with the high-ranking state officials who make these unwise decisions.

A couple of months ago, another SWAT-team-style search was held in the office of a Gainesville realtor. In the meantime, the residents of east Gainesville are in great need of increased law enforcement presence in their once peaceful neighborhoods. The same week that my friends experienced their home invasion in Gainesville, there were at least three people

shot in the city. I have to wonder how many people were shot during the week the Gainesville realtor's office was invaded?

While these two searches were conducted for different reasons, would it not be more cost effective if the Florida officials who ordered these searches used empirically validated risk assessments to determine which Gainesville residents actually need to be recipients of such aggressive searches, thereby freeing up money to fight actual crime? In my friends' case, they were told that their house was randomly determined by a computer program. Was this an investigation in search of a crime when there is so much real, violent crime occurring right under law enforcement's nose?