



ORGANIZED CRIME SPOTLIGHT

OUTLAW
MOTORCYCLE
GANGS:

**The Rise of the Pagans
in New Jersey**

State of New Jersey
Commission of Investigation

September 2020



State of New Jersey

COMMISSION OF INVESTIGATION

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September 2020

Governor Phil Murphy
The President and Members of the Senate
The Speaker and Members of the General Assembly

The State Commission of Investigation, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:9M, herewith submits for your information and review a report of findings and recommendations stemming from an investigation into the resurgence of the Pagans Outlaw Motorcycle Gang in New Jersey.

Respectfully,

Joseph F. Scancarella
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Robert J. Burzichelli
Commissioner

John A. Hoffman
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Introduction

The biker sat parked next to a pump at a Newark gas station when a burly man wielding a metal bat approached from behind. The first blow – one of many more to come – struck the back of the biker’s head. Three other men soon joined the melee, hitting and kicking the biker – a Hells Angel Motorcycle Club associate – as he helplessly flailed on the ground. This savage attack of a rival by members of the Pagans Motorcycle Club occurred in the middle of an afternoon in April 2018 at a busy service station. A surveillance video of the beating showed innocent bystanders – including a woman who emerged from a nearby car with two small children in tow – fleeing from the brawl.

At the other end of the state on a June night nearly a year prior, a military-like operation unfolded at a Gloucester County sports bar when more than two dozen Pagans – fully decked out in gang colors and wearing black skull bandanas pulled over their faces – rode into the parking lot and blocked off the entrances. The Pagans went inside the bar – a known hangout for a rival biker club – and systematically checked out the patrons one-by-one, seemingly looking for a particular individual. After departing without incident, it was unclear to local police if the bikers did not find their intended target or if the exercise was merely to send a message to their adversaries.

The State Commission of Investigation found violent and disturbing incidents like those detailed above have become increasingly common in New Jersey as the Pagans dramatically expanded its membership ranks over the last three years, nearly doubling the number of chapters statewide from 10 in 2016 to 17 in 2020.¹ According to law enforcement estimates, there are approximately 200 Pagans statewide but the Commission found the number of members in New Jersey is probably far greater. Once mostly based in South Jersey, the outlaw motorcycle gang has pushed as far north as Bergen County and into territories traditionally dominated by its longtime nemesis, the Hells Angels, as part of a strategy by its national leadership to establish dominance along the entire East Coast of the United States.²

This larger presence, combined with the Pagans’ desire to flex its collective muscles, predictably led to numerous clashes with rivals, some of which occurred in public places and in broad daylight. Law enforcement experts told the Commission that there were more incidents of violence committed by the Pagans during a recent 18-month period than the prior ten years combined, but the actual tally was likely higher because many incidents go unreported. Even more alarming, the Commission found private citizens were not simply caught in the middle of

¹ The number of chapters at the time of publication of this report.

² The Commission developed information that indicated there are upwards of 300 current and former Pagan members living in New Jersey. It is difficult for law enforcement to track the exact number of members, in part, because it is fluid and constantly changing.

the biker warfare, in some cases they were the designated marks for the gang's attacks. The inquiry revealed numerous incidents in New Jersey where the Pagans carried out acts of intimidation and physical assaults against members of the general public – some of whom had nothing whatsoever to do with the biker club.

Along with carrying out documented assaults, shootings and other violent acts, Pagans remain involved in the extortion of legitimate businesses, muscle-for-hire debt collection schemes and the illegal possession of weapons. They have been known to partner with traditional organized crime to collect gambling and loan sharking debts. The Pagans also continue to maintain their long-standing foothold in the drug trade, particularly in the distribution of methamphetamine.

This unprecedented period of growth and the explosion of violence that accompanied it are the results of a paradigm shift in the overall operation of the Pagans. Motivated by the desire to achieve supremacy in the motorcycle club domain, leadership of the Pagans relaxed longtime biker traditions related to the recruitment process and removed blockades to membership for some in the interest of quickly building up its ranks. Under these eased restrictions, particular groups once excluded from the club – such as certain ethnic minorities and former street gang members – became Pagans. In some instances, Pagans extended membership to individuals willing to pay for it – a practice referred to by some as “cash for colors.”

The call for the Pagans to aggressively recruit, expand and display its force came directly from the gang's national president Keith “Conan” Richter. A former sergeant at arms for the national club, Richter served 16 years in federal prison for ordering the killing of a Long Island, NY strip club manager who refused to pay extortion fees to the Pagans in 1998. After his release, Richter assumed the presidency in a hostile takeover in 2018. Under Richter's leadership, membership of the Pagans grew quickly, not just here in New Jersey but along the entire East Coast, going as far south as Florida and, for the first time establishing chapters in parts of Puerto Rico.

This Pagan resurgence – especially the increased violence and other illegal acts that have accompanied it – not only threatens the public peace and public safety of the citizens of New Jersey, it also presents significant challenges for those responsible for protecting it. Along with the usage of encryption communications technology to shield their activities from outside scrutiny, Pagans have found other means to frustrate and undermine law enforcement. Chief among those are counter-surveillance operations designed to uncover and thwart policing tactics. Further complicating suppression efforts is that some law enforcement authorities remain reluctant to share intelligence with other policing agencies due to incidents in which confidential information was leaked to the Pagans.

Concerns about the existing and escalating peril posed by the Pagans prompted the Commission to hold a public hearing in October 2019 to air its initial findings about the gang. The investigation was undertaken as part of the Commission's statutory obligation to keep the public informed of the operations of organized crime and the problems of criminal law enforcement in the State. The hearing included the appearance of three suspected high-ranking New Jersey-based Pagans who were subpoenaed by the Commission to provide testimony regarding the club's organized criminal activities. All three men invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in response to all the questions posed by SCI counsel.³

The Commission wishes to thank those who generously shared their expertise and offered valuable insights throughout the course of this inquiry. The completion of this investigation would not have been possible without the participation of various law enforcement agencies at the federal, regional, state and local levels.

During the course of this inquiry, numerous law enforcement authorities raised significant concerns about a general sense of mistrust that now exists between many agencies following instances in which confidential information accessible only to police personnel wound up in the possession of the Pagans. This is a serious matter that requires immediate attention from the larger policing community. Without assurances that sensitive information will not end up in the hands of the bikers or other organized criminal groups, and lacking the certainty that all parties are working in unison for the common goal of protecting public safety, any potential improvements to the current system are hollow and meaningless.

With that in mind, the Commission offers a series of reform recommendations – presented in further detail at the conclusion of this report – to assist government in general, and law enforcement in particular, to fulfill their central duty to safeguard its citizens. A chief component in any reform must address how various jurisdictions can rebuild this broken trust and develop new mechanisms to better synchronize collective efforts to effectively control and contain outlaw motorcycle gangs. Further, a training gap exists in some departments that impede officers' ability to both recognize and link illegal activity committed by outlaw motorcycle gangs. Enhancement in these arenas is mandatory in order for police personnel to successfully combat organized criminal groups.

³ The only testimony provided by the Pagans during the SCI's public hearing was from Hugo "Zorro" Nieves, then-Vice President of the national Pagans organization, who made the following statement: "All I will say is that it is not the policy of this club for anybody to engage in any criminal activity."

Origins and History

Originally founded as a fellowship of 13 motorcyclists, the Pagans were established in Prince George's County, Maryland in 1959. The group evolved into a more formal motorcycle club with a specific governing structure, rules and traditions in the 1960s. As the number of chapters increased and spread to neighboring states, the Pagans joined other biker clubs in embracing the criminal outlaw motorcycle gang philosophy. It was around this time that the Pagans began to identify as "one-percenters," a term adopted by certain motorcycle clubs to signify their outlaw status. It grew out of a statement attributed – possibly incorrectly – to the American Motorcycle Association following an alleged riot at a 1947 motorcycle-racing event in Hollister, Calif. that 99 percent of all motorcyclists were law-abiding citizens. To this day, Pagan members wear a one percent patch to display their outlaw pride.⁴

The Pagans are considered by law enforcement to be among the largest and most crime-prone outlaw motorcycle gangs in the country, along with the Hells Angels, Outlaws, Bandidos and Sons of Silence.⁵ These organizations have enough national impact to face prosecution under the U.S. Federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute. In New Jersey and other states, numerous successful federal racketeering prosecutions during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a substantial decline in Pagan membership and overt activity.

In the ensuing decades, the Pagans maintained a presence within particular sections of the state. A 1989 SCI report tracking organized criminal groups estimated there were 40 to 60 active Pagan members statewide based out of chapters in Atlantic County, Elizabeth and Plainfield. The group's primary illicit activities in those years were chop shops – businesses that disassemble stolen vehicles to sell the parts – and methamphetamine sales. At the time, the drug was either manufactured by the Pagans or by an associate hired to serve as a "cooker." The SCI report noted the demand for methamphetamine declined later in the 1980s, as cocaine became society's drug of choice.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, tensions between the Pagans and its longtime adversary the Hells Angels escalated when the rival gang moved into the New Jersey-New York region, infiltrating a territory traditionally dominated by the Pagans. There were a number of Pagans – including some high-ranking members – who changed allegiances and "patched over" to the Hells Angels. These developments contributed to a decline in Pagan membership and an

⁴ The American Motorcycle has denied making the statement claiming the organization's comments were misquoted in press accounts of the Hollister event. Regardless of its origin, the one percent moniker for outlaw motorcycle gangs has endured.

⁵ The U.S. Department of Justice has specific criteria it uses to designate an association of bikers as an outlaw motorcycle gang. The full definition is here: <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ocgs/gallery/outlaw-motorcycle-gangs-omgs>.

increase in violent confrontations between the two gangs. To drive up its membership totals, the Pagans began recruiting new members from support clubs affiliated with the outlaw gang. Meanwhile, the gangs remained active in narcotics sales, sometimes employing street gang members to aid in drug distribution operations. Pagans in the region also developed mutually beneficial business relationships with *La Cosa Nostra*.

In the subsequent years, the Pagans continued their involvement in sporadic violence and in drug distribution throughout the state but the club's membership numbers remained relatively low in comparison to other outlaw motorcycle gangs like the Hells Angels. In New Jersey, the group primarily operated in South Jersey with some pockets of activity in northern sections of the state – such as longtime Pagan stronghold Elizabeth – but had not had a significant presence in North Jersey since 2009. But that all changed dramatically nearly three years ago when the Pagans launched a rapid expansion in New Jersey and across the region, not only boosting its membership numbers but also bringing an unprecedented spike in violence.

The Paradigm Shift

Law enforcement experts told the Commission that the Pagans underwent a radical change in operations after Keith “Conan” Richter took over as National President in 2018. The Pagans became more militant and eager to incite hostilities with any person or group perceived as an enemy. With the goal of making the Pagans the region's preeminent one percent club, Richter also utilized unorthodox means to quickly expand its ranks, such as easing – or sometimes completely abandoning – certain long-established biker customs related to recruitment and membership.

Among the radical departures from tradition was the elimination of the once-lengthy recruitment phase, known as “prospecting.” Under club rules, the prospecting period is usually at least six months. During that time, recruits undergo various hazing-type rituals and must prove their loyalty to the gang before they are invited to join it. The Commission found that under Richter's regime some newcomers avoided the prospecting phase altogether by paying cash – from \$600 to \$1,000 – to join the gang. Most outlaw motorcycle clubs, including the Pagans, whose own bylaws state there is no such thing as “instant colors,” forbid payment to obtain membership.

In a complete reversal of prior practice, the Pagans invited certain ethnic minorities and former criminal street gang members to join its ranks. The former Bloods, Crips and Latin Kings brought experience with street violence to the Pagans, a valuable asset in the club's quest to dominate rivals. While the Pagans still prohibit Blacks from joining the gang, they have recently permitted certain dark-skinned Latinos and other ethnic minorities to become members.

As part of the push to enlarge its membership numbers quickly, the Pagans also broadened the practice of patching over members from other outlaw clubs allied with the organization. Instead of permitting a few bikers from these smaller clubs to join its ranks, the Pagans began patching over the entire membership. Many associates of these smaller biker clubs who had previously belonged to a traditional street gang acquired their Pagan membership in this way.

Law enforcement authorities told the Commission that inside the Pagan organization there has been some internal strife from older members who disagree with this more relaxed approach and believe the gang should adhere to traditional protocols, particularly those related to barring minorities from membership. Some Pagans have white supremacist leanings and, in the past, the gang has affiliations with organizations whose members hold those beliefs. During the 2019 Roar to the Shore event in Wildwood – a mandatory biker event that draws members from throughout the region – SCI surveillance observed Pagans members with white supremacist tattoos and patches.

A Well-Organized Structure

While the Pagans may have slackened certain rules for membership, the gang's leaders have taken a decidedly more structured approach in relation to the management of the daily operation of the organization. Law enforcement, along with confidential sources, told the Commission that since Richter took over the Pagans oversight of the club is stricter and it became more organized than it had been in the past. The top leadership is involved in the decision-making process for matters large and small, including keeping track of new prospects, updating membership rosters for the chapters and approving all merchandise sold by the Pagans.

Like most biker clubs, the Pagans are a chapter-based group with individual branches located in a particular region or city. The overall administration of the organization is run by a group of officers who sit on the governing body of the national club, called the Mother Club. At the top is the president – known as “The Diamond” – followed by the vice president, who runs the club in the president's absence, a sergeant at arms, secretary and treasurer. The Mother Club has general oversight for all facets of Pagan business, everything from recruitment matters and rulings on the status of members who seek to leave the club to the authorization of new chapters and the approval for all tattoos. There is also often another layer of oversight – the President of Presidents – that serve as a liaison between the chapters and the Mother Club.

The individual chapters also have their own chain of command organized under the same structure used by the Mother Club. Under rules set in the Pagan's constitution, chapters must hold one organized meeting weekly, a proceeding referred to as “church.” Only members may attend chapter meetings and all attendees must arrive sober. Any member who misses three

meetings in a row is kicked out of the club. Members pay monthly dues of approximately \$100, with at least some portion of those monies flowing up to the Mother Club. Pagans must also participate in bike runs organized by the club and sell Pagan-authorized merchandise such as t-shirts.

Membership Rules

To become a Pagan, you must be a male over the age of 18, own a Harley-Davidson motorcycle with an engine 900cc or larger and hold a motorcycle license. As mentioned earlier, the gang does not permit Blacks to join the Pagans but has recently somewhat relaxed restrictions barring entry based solely on cultural background and granted membership to some ethnic minorities. However, the Pagans continue to hold the line on prohibiting anyone who works in law enforcement, even those long removed from it, from joining the gang.⁶

A recruit must receive a vote of approval from chapter members to join the gang. Once he becomes an official member of the gang, the Pagan receives his colors. Pagans wear cuts – either leather or denim vests or jackets with the sleeves cut off – that include a three-piece patch on the back, referred to collectively as its colors.⁷ The top patch has the word “Pagan’s” in blue Gothic print on a white background. The middle patch is a depiction of the fiery Norse God, Surtur, carrying a Sword of Twilight and underneath it, there are two lower patches with letters “M” and “C” for motorcycle club. More recently, the Pagans added a bottom rocker with “East Coast” emblazoned on it to denote the gang’s takeover of the region.

Pagans hold the utmost respect for their colors and “fly” their colors whenever the member is representing the organization. Members must protect their colors and never allow any person to take them unless the order comes from the president of the chapter or an area advisor. Any member expelled from the club must turn in their colors and any other items that have “Pagan’s” on it.

While the Pagans have publicly stated the motorcycle club does not participate in criminal activities, the gang has written guidelines to follow in case of the arrest of a member. Any arrest must be reported to the president of the chapter within 24 hours. Similar reporting requirements exist for chapter presidents and members of the Mother Club, who must inform superiors if they are arrested. The failure to report an arrest to the Pagans organization will result in a penalty ranging from a fine to revocation of membership, according to its rules.

Women are specifically forbidden from membership, and under Pagan bylaws, are ranked below dogs among items of importance for members. Wives and girlfriends of Pagans are

⁶ Despite this prohibition, the Commission is aware of individuals with law enforcement background who were permitted to join the Pagans.

⁷ Colors are also sometimes called rags.

referred to as “old ladies,” and may wear patches that denote they are “the property of” a particular member. They may attend Pagan rallies or large events but must always be in the company of other women or with their “old man.” At the bottom of the hierarchical system for women are so-called “pets” who are shared sexually among the group. Despite their general disregard for them, women perform vital functions for the gang, such as transporting narcotics and firearms and relaying messages to incarcerated members.

Illicit Activities

Narcotics Sales

Despite club bylaws that prohibit members from engaging in or profiting from drug sales, narcotics sales have long been a central component of the Pagans’ criminal activities. In New Jersey, the Pagans sell cocaine and marijuana but methamphetamine remains the primary narcotic sold by members. Although the Pagans previously manufactured the drug themselves in makeshift labs, the Commission found the bikers largely abandoned that practice and now obtain it from elements of the Mexican drug cartel. Law enforcement and confidential sources told the Commission that cartel operatives working out of Philadelphia and Atlanta now provide a direct conduit for the narcotic.

The Commission found the gang’s more recent drug distribution activities in New Jersey tend to be small-scale independent operations that involve only a few individuals rather than the entire membership of a chapter. Under this cell-like structure, a limited number of Pagans participate in the day-to-day narcotics transactions and distribution while other chapter members hold only basic knowledge of it, and are unaware of the source of the narcotics or where the proceeds go. If police disrupt the sales network, this strategy helps to protect the larger group from prosecution because only a limited number of people know the details.

The Commission identified nearly a dozen of these types of independent narcotics operations in South Jersey, based out of chapters in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. These cells operated as standalone businesses, functioned independently from each other and had their own customers. In some instances, chapter leaders orchestrated the drug operations and utilized lower-ranking members or associates to distribute drugs to customers. The inquiry revealed that the demand for narcotics in the region was so great that one prominent supplier to several of these South Jersey Pagan operations had been receiving more than 50 pounds of crystal methamphetamine every five or six weeks from a cartel-based source. These enterprises undoubtedly resulted in sizable profits for the proprietors. According to law enforcement sources, one pound of the narcotic can yield thousands of doses that can net up to \$50,000 on the street from drug sales.

Violence

Increased violence has been a hallmark of the Pagan resurgence. Gang members have become increasingly combative with not only rivals but against anyone the gang believes is a threat or has shown it disrespect. This newfound level of aggression has led to drive-by shootings, savage beat downs of adversaries and unprovoked physical assaults on members of the public across New Jersey.

Many of the clashes with rival bikers came as the Pagans made a concerted effort to expand in North Jersey into territories traditionally dominated by the Hells Angels. Renewed bloodshed between the two gangs can be traced back to June 2017 when a provocation instigated by the Pagans resulted in the Hells Angels shooting two of the bikers in Elizabeth. The Pagans had just completed a power ride past their rival's clubhouse in Newark, a biker practice done to stake claim to an adversary's territory. Police suspect the Pagans were also behind drive-by shootings that sprayed gunfire at the Hells Angels clubhouse on two consecutive days in February 2019.

In South Jersey, much of the Pagan's rancor in recent years has been directed at the Warlocks, its chief adversary in that region. To exhibit its dominance, the Pagans launched various takeovers of area bars and restaurants, including one occasion in June 2017 where more than 100 members and associates packed into a small pub as one of the bikers rode his motorcycle inside and did burnouts on the floor. A day before, a group of Pagans conducted a power ride past the Gloucester County home of the former national president of the Warlocks.

While these represent documented accounts of acts of intimidation and gun violence involving Pagans, law enforcement authorities told the Commission that the actual number of incidents was likely higher because most incidents that ensue between rival clubs are undocumented unless the incident takes place in a public venue and someone outside one of the gangs calls the police to report it.

Unsuspecting Victims

A disturbing trend that has emerged as part of the escalation of violence by the Pagans is that gang members are no longer simply attacking rivals but are now also directing hostilities at random people in bars, drivers on the road and other non-gang affiliated citizens across New Jersey.

Some of the incidents identified by the Commission appear intended merely to intimidate the victim, such as an episode where a female motorist's vehicle was briefly surrounded by a group of Pagan bikers on a Cumberland County roadway after one of the riders perceived the driver had cut them off. Sometimes Pagans act as *de facto* traffic cops and block off sections of

roads so their riding packs can pass through an intersection. Other times, the bikers bully customers into vacating public places like bars so gang members can have the place to themselves.

However, on other occasions, Pagan aggression resulted in physical assaults that brought serious bodily harm to the victims. Often, the targets of the attacks have limited or – in some cases, no connection at all – to the bikers, and their only discernible transgression was some sort of perceived act of disrespect toward the Pagans.

During the Commission’s public hearing New Jersey State Police Lieutenant Michael Peterson, unit head of the Real Time Crime Center South, testified that these types of attacks have become increasingly common in South Jersey.⁸ Recent assaults in which a member of the public was the intended target included a Pagan beating of a landlord in Wildwood who attempted to evict a tenant – a woman connected to the biker gang – after she failed to pay the rent and the stabbing of an individual who was apparently unwelcome at a private Pagan party.

The Commission found this propensity for violence against the public was not exclusive to South Jersey. In 2019, there were several ostensibly unprovoked attacks on members of the public in Elizabeth, a longtime Pagan stronghold in North Jersey. Among the most serious of these incidents occurred at a bar where a patron was hit in the head with an axe handle – a weapon favored by the Pagans – during an assault in January 2019. Prior to the attack, the man had been speaking to a female bartender when a known Pagan approached and verbally threatened him, according to a police report of the event. The biker and two of his cohorts ambushed the patron and the Pagan who had spoken to the man earlier struck the victim twice on the head with the axe handle, drawing blood. The male victim told police he did not recognize his assailant and had never had any previous contact with him.

In another incident in June 2019, the Pagans hunted down and attacked a man on a motorcycle after he passed two of its members on the right on southbound Route 1 in Elizabeth. According to a police report detailing the incident, the Pagans followed the motorcyclist after he exited the highway and made a series of turns on local streets. One of the bikers and another Pagan who trailed him in a car ultimately cut off the man’s path. The bikers allegedly yelled, “Do you know who we are?” before striking the motorcyclist multiple times in the head and body with a small bat and a wrench. They also damaged the man’s motorcycle by hitting it repeatedly. As is often the case with many of the acts of violence committed by the Pagans, the victim initially filed a complaint with police but later decided he did not want to pursue the matter further because he feared retaliation by the Pagans.

⁸ The Real Time Crime Center South is a regional information and intelligence sharing command center operated by the New Jersey State Police’s Regional Operational and Intelligence Center.

The Commission identified several other recent incidents where the Pagans endangered public safety. These events included wanton attacks on individuals who had no known affiliation with the Pagans as well as instances where innocent victims were caught in the middle of dangerous acts perpetrated by the bikers. Among the attacks:

- A patron at a tavern in Neptune City was punched in the head and knocked unconscious by a Pagan. The man had been speaking with a woman in the bar before the Pagan approached and assaulted him, according to a police report of the incident.
- Two Pagans assaulted a relative of a gang member at the man's worksite in South Jersey. The victim said the bikers told him it was payback for mistreatment of their fellow Pagan, and, that if he called police his family would be attacked.
- A Pagan allegedly involved in a fight outside a Union bar, fled the scene and was observed on a residential door video camera throwing a weapon under a parked car.

Extortion, Muscle-for-Hire and the Mob

The Commission found the Pagans remain involved in various types of extortion plots and muscle-for-hire schemes. In some of these operations, the Pagans have formed alliances with other organized criminal groups in furtherance of the unlawful activity.

Legitimate businesses, primarily bars and restaurants, have long been targeted by the Pagans in extortion schemes. The Commission described how outlaw motorcycle gangs used this tactic in the 2004 report, *The Changing Face of Organized Crime in New Jersey*:

Under this approach, gang members assume control of a business, such as a tavern or a bar, by frequenting the establishment and, through their menacing presence, driving away the regular clientele. A member of the club then approaches the owner offering protection for a price.

More recently, the Commission found numerous proprietors of businesses in South Jersey had fallen victim to these types of shakedowns. In the latest version of the scheme, Pagans visit establishments prior to the start of the summer season and demand the owner make weekly protection payments, according to local law enforcement. Police believe the refusal to make such payments was part of what led to the assault of a Wildwood bar owner who was beaten with a pool stick in 2017 soon after he objected to the Pagan's protection fee demand.

The Pagans have also extorted payments from motorcycle clubs that seek to fly their colors or ride Harley Davidson bikes in South Jersey. Pagans in that region have contacted and informed these clubs that they must pay monthly dues to the gang or disband. These clubs are typically comprised of recreational riders who do not participate in criminal activity. One club

was told that the Pagans must authorize it and that each of its members must pay monthly dues of \$10, or it would need to cease operation.

The Commission found the Pagans work in partnerships with other criminal groups to execute various schemes. Evidence uncovered during the course of the investigation suggests that the Pagans continue to assist *La Cosa Nostra* in the collection of gambling and loan sharking debt, a trend that was reported in the SCI's 2004 report on organized crime. Further, the Commission found Pagans have also provided the muscle to collect payments in extortion schemes run by other criminal groups, such as the Skinheads.

Guns and Ammo

The investigation revealed that Pagans have ready access to weapons and ammunition, and a member in need of a gun can usually obtain one from another Pagan. One confidential source testified that he was provided with a weapon – on more than one occasion – when he was ordered to go on mandatory runs as a Pagan prospect several years ago.

Local police found Pagans in possession of a wide variety of armaments – including guns, brass knuckles and knives – in numerous vehicle stops of Pagan members during the 2019 Roar to the Shore in Wildwood. Police discovered three weapons and several rounds of the particularly lethal hollow-point bullets during a vehicle stop of an out-of-state Pagan. Police charged two Pagans in the vehicle with possession of illegal weapons.

Some Pagan members have compiled sizable weapons arsenals in their New Jersey homes. One Morris County-based Pagan was arrested in the summer of 2019 after police conducted a motor vehicle stop and found him in possession of a meat cleaver, brass knuckles and drug paraphernalia. After a search of the Pagan's home on an unrelated domestic matter, police found four handguns, 22 rifles and/or shotguns along with hundreds of rounds of ammunition. In 2017, another Pagan faced numerous weapons possession charges after police discovered scores of weapons – including six long guns, thirteen containers of bullets and a homemade flamethrower – at his Monmouth County residence.

Challenges for Law Enforcement

Those responsible for protecting public safety from the growing danger posed by the Pagans face distinct obstacles as the gang has grown more sophisticated in undermining and frustrating law enforcement. Gang members conduct counter-surveillance on policing operations and utilize encrypted communications technology to shield their activities from outside scrutiny. Criminal cases against Pagans often hit roadblocks because victims and eyewitnesses are unwilling to cooperate with the police. Further, many policing units must contend with serious gaps in intelligence development and information sharing both internally and across agencies.

Tactics to Evade or Undermine Police

The Pagans take precautions to ensure that no one outside the group is privy to conversations between members. Face-to-face discussions are always preferred but if Pagans need to communicate using electronic means they must use an encrypted app on their cellphones to make calls or send messages to each other. By utilizing encryption apps, Pagan members can ensure that all the information remains private and inaccessible to anyone outside the organization. Traditionally, law enforcement authorities have obtained wiretaps to listen to or intercept such communications but the encryption technology inhibits their ability to access the conversations.

Pagans also keep a close eye on police efforts to monitor the gang's activities and frequently launch counter-surveillance operations to watch law enforcement. At large rallies, the Pagans will plant members in the crowd to scan for and identify undercover law enforcement officers. Other times, the gang uses video-based aerial technology – better known as drones – to monitor the activities of law enforcement.⁹ Even more challenging are the large-scale biker events that draw various groups that are simultaneously conducting surveillance on each other and watching the police.

Another obstacle facing law enforcement authorities is that many times criminal cases stall or go nowhere because victims and eyewitnesses are afraid that if they provide information to help police the Pagans will retaliate against them with physical violence or worse. It is also common for victims to file an initial complaint but later refuse to provide any additional cooperation. The Pagans have told some victims explicitly that if they contact police about a particular incident the gang will seek retribution against them or their families. These ominous threats have discouraged citizens from offering any assistance that could greatly aid law enforcement in its efforts to combat the gang.

⁹ A counter-surveillance drone was observed during law enforcement surveillance of the 2018 Roar to the Shore event in Wildwood.

Intelligence Gaps

To counteract the threat presented by outlaw motorcycle gangs, law enforcement must be armed with reliable intelligence information about the organization in order to develop effective strategies to combat it. Nevertheless, the Commission found that many policing units in New Jersey face hurdles in the collection and development of intelligence related to motorcycle gangs. Exacerbating this problem is a reluctance within the law enforcement community to share confidential information with other agencies after incidents in which sensitive material ended up in the hands of the bikers.

Law enforcement witnesses testified at the public hearing that police reports from jurisdictions across the state routinely fail to capture pertinent details, such as the documentation of an individual's association with a particular criminal group. Without this contextual information, law enforcement is unable to link it to cases with similar types of crime or to identify larger trends. State Police Lt. Michael Peterson testified to the following:

...I think a lot of it has to do with understanding an act that may actually be connected to a larger organization. Very often an unknowing officer will write a report, let's say for an assault not really understanding that there is more to this story than the actual act itself.

Peterson suggested that educating officers so they can improve their data collection methods as well as continuing to share intelligence information across agencies to ensure personnel is aware of issues surrounding particular groups would help alleviate this shortcoming. Those sentiments were echoed by Joseph Giordano, an assistant prosecutor with the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, who testified that progress could be made by "changing the mentality and readjusting the investigative techniques" used by law enforcement.¹⁰

Indeed, working with other law enforcement agencies to exchange knowledge and share information about the illegal activities, behaviors and inner-workings of organized criminal groups is a critical component in creating successful strategies to battle gangs. Employing a cooperative approach is particularly productive when tackling an evolving group, like the Pagans, that has constantly changing membership rosters, is rapidly opening new chapters and expanding into some regions of New Jersey for the first time.

However, the Commission found there is a significant impediment blocking greater collaboration in law enforcement in this arena due to an uneasiness that exists between some policing agencies in the state after numerous incidents in which confidential information was leaked to the Pagans. In these episodes, information discussed at intelligence meetings where

¹⁰ Giordano has since taken another position and no longer works at the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

only law enforcement was present as well as written documentation of police sensitive biker-related material ultimately ended up in the hands of the Pagans. Overcoming this disinclination to collaborate and cooperate with other jurisdictions is a major barrier that law enforcement authorities must overcome if they hope to effectively address the escalating violence and danger presented by the Pagans. It is also imperative for agencies to strengthen their relationships and intelligence sharing capabilities with other policing units to ensure the development of successful suppression and containment strategies in combating not only the Pagans but also the many other organized criminal groups that threaten New Jersey.

Referrals and Recommendations

The Commission refers the findings of this investigation to the following governmental agencies for any action they deem appropriate.

- The New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, including the Office of the Attorney General, the Division of Criminal Justice and the State Police.
- The Office of the United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey.
- Office of the County Prosecutor in each of New Jersey's 21 counties.

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The Commission's findings demonstrate that the rapid and ongoing expansion of the Pagans Motorcycle Club in New Jersey, particularly the uptick in violence that has accompanied its growth, represents a substantial threat to the public safety of citizens of this state and presents major challenges for those responsible for protecting it. In order to successfully combat the Pagans, New Jersey and its law enforcement community need to be equipped with top-notch intelligence and more effective tools to assess and suppress this dangerous and evolving organized criminal group. Moreover, any strategy that is developed to tackle the Pagans and other one percent clubs must be done in a collective fashion with participation by law enforcement at all levels – from local police all the way to the federal government. Complicating efforts to embrace this approach is that some public safety professionals in New Jersey are reluctant to share intelligence with colleagues in other jurisdictions following recent incidents in which law-enforcement sensitive information was leaked to the Pagans. It is important that any reservations law enforcement personnel have about working in partnerships with colleagues in other agencies are resolved. Given this concern, the State should take the lead in creating a mechanism in which various law enforcement agencies come together to identify, share and collaborate on criminal matters related to outlaw biker clubs. No law enforcement agency can productively fight outlaw motorcycle gangs – or any organized criminal groups for that matter –

alone. Law enforcement partnerships are essential in combating evolving threats and keeping communities safe. But in order for it to be successful, all participating agencies must remain committed to safeguarding intelligence information to ensure it is only accessible to authorized personnel and make it clear that any attempt to do otherwise will not be tolerated.

In furtherance of this effort, and pursuant of its statutory mandate, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. Establish a Statewide Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Working Group

Throughout New Jersey, numerous units and entities are already actively engaged in collecting, extracting, analyzing and disseminating criminal intelligence data related to organized crime and non-traditional crime groups. For many of these entities, the Pagans specifically, and outlaw motorcycle gangs in general, represent a small subset of the many organized criminal groups they monitor. However, given the Commission's recent findings regarding how the Pagan's violent resurgence has repeatedly endangered the public safety, along with the gang's ongoing involvement in various forms of criminality – including drug distribution and extortion – and its alliances with other organized crime organizations, warrants further scrutiny of outlaw motorcycle gangs and their activities in New Jersey. As mentioned throughout this report, the Commission's investigation revealed that the Pagans do not represent the sole threat coming from the outlaw motorcycle club domain. Much of the Pagan-involved violence – including shootings and assaults – were clashes with rival outlaw motorcycle gangs, including the Hells Angels and Warlocks, whose members fully participated in fierce battles with their adversaries. The Pagans also have recently permitted members of other criminal groups, including street gangs, to join its ranks uniting once disparate groups into a shared organized criminal enterprise.

To address these matters, the Commission recommends the following:

- The Office of the Attorney General should establish and oversee a working group of law enforcement entities throughout the state devoted to identifying, investigating and prosecuting criminal activity perpetrated by outlaw motorcycle gangs.

- Each of the 21 county prosecutor's offices should designate at least one representative to serve on the panel. In that capacity, the county designee should work with municipal police officers to collect intelligence information on outlaw motorcycle gang activity in communities within the given county. Participants in this endeavor should also include other state, federal, and regional law enforcement personnel with experience in this arena, working in combination with agencies that oversee and investigate organized criminal activity.
- Along with gathering intelligence, the working group should work collaboratively with state and federal gang units to target particular clubs, chapters, charters, cells or individuals that, based on intelligence, are actively engaged in criminal activities.
- The working group should utilize New Jersey State Police's Regional Operational and Intelligence Center (NJ ROIC) which is the State's primary focal point for information sharing and intelligence production in support of law enforcement operations.

2. Mandate Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Training for Law Enforcement

Law enforcement personnel in New Jersey should receive specialized training on outlaw motorcycle gangs. Currently, most public safety officers receive limited, if any, training specifically related to outlaw motorcycle gangs. Sometimes this type of the instruction is made available on the local level or in a piecemeal fashion but it is not currently provided in any centralized or consistent way that ensures all New Jersey law enforcement personnel have access to the same type of training and the information provided through such courses. Aside from learning about the history, ideology, membership and trends for the various gangs, any required training should provide instruction on identifying characteristics of members, tactics on how to collect such information and subsequently compile it for intelligence purposes. Any mandated training on outlaw motorcycle gangs should be part of the initial police training that recruits receive and should be conducted on annual basis or at some regular interval to keep officers abreast of developments and trends in the biker domain.

3. Improve Police Training in Intelligence Gathering and Documentation

The failure to collect and record relevant details – including those that may indicate an individual has an affiliation with a particular organized criminal group – is an ongoing inadequacy noted by law enforcement authorities who have reviewed police incident reports from agencies throughout the state. Without this kind of identifying information, it is nearly impossible to link individual instances – particularly those that, at least initially, may appear unrelated – to other events, individuals and groups, or to identify larger trends. The relevance of capturing these pertinent details was noted by former Essex County Assistant Prosecutor Giordano who testified at the Commission’s public hearing that the first incident report written after the April 2018 beating of a Hells Angels associate at a Newark gas station by members of the Pagans failed to mention the gang affiliations for both the victim and the perpetrators of the attacks. Lacking these key details, law enforcement could have easily concluded it was an isolated act of violence, not part of an ongoing dispute between rival gangs.

To remedy this shortcoming, the Commission recommends all police personnel in New Jersey should be required to receive updated training to improve methods for both recognizing relevant identifying information and documenting suspicious and criminal activity. This training should be mandated statewide so that all law enforcement agencies follow the same standards and utilize uniform investigative techniques. While weaknesses in this regard were noted by witnesses in the context of reports written on outlaw motorcycle groups, any instruction that helps law enforcement personnel strengthen intelligence gathering skills and to write more detailed investigative reports will be beneficial to the entire law enforcement community in New Jersey regardless of the type of case or subject matter under investigation.



*State of New Jersey
Commission of Investigation*