

No-snitch mentality is a lie

12 hrs ago

In 1929, a bullet-ridden gangster, gunned down in the Valentine's Day Massacre but still clinging to life when police arrived on the scene, obstinately declared "nobody shot me." In 2017, 100 people in attendance at a party in Kankakee, similarly claimed "nobody saw anything" after a young man was shot to death in their midst. Eight decades later, the "no-snitch" mentality still proves to be one of the biggest barriers nationally to solving and prosecuting murder and other violent crime, and Kankakee County is no exception. But it can be.

The no-snitch mentality lies to our youth: it tells them that there is shame in 'snitching' on predators who are killing and destroying our community; it convinces them that cooperating with law enforcement to get justice for a murdered friend is somehow cowardly; it reduces snitches to the level of the predator. Witnesses not wanting to be labeled a "snitch" allow murderers to get away with murder and, in the worst case, to murder again.

Recently, a young man was gunned down in Kankakee; his family immediately took to Facebook pleading for someone to come forward, as did I and other members of law enforcement. However, only a few months before he was gunned down, this same victim took to Facebook to warn "snitches" cooperating with the police that they "need to stop telling before [they] end up somewhere smelling." The irony is tragic, but it tells the truest of tales: when the victim is a loved one, we want witnesses to come forward, we cry on television and plead for justice. But when we witness a crime and suddenly have the power to bring justice to some other family and take a murderer off our streets, we are silent.

As a result, neighborhoods throughout our county that are full of hard working, honorable residents are held hostage by just a few gangbangers, a few drug dealers and a few violent criminals. And crime in any part of our county impacts all of our county — it affects the quality of life; where we travel and at what time of day; whether we venture to the river or community park at night, or a festival across town after hours; whether we will patronize businesses in certain communities or spend our paycheck in others; whether employers will ever relocate here; whether we are a community that values and protects life, or a community that turns a blind eye even to cold-blooded murder.

It's time to fight back, to speak up, and to begin to hold people responsible for murdering innocent men, women, and children. Witnesses must speak up so loudly that they drown out the drumbeat of criminals that say it's not honorable to cooperate with law enforcement. And it isn't enough to merely assist law enforcement, we must police our own communities and be equal partners in the fight to get violent criminals off our streets. As State's Attorney I pledge the full force of my Office to do everything we can to remove murderers and violent offenders from our community for as long as the law allows. I will help to organize a neighborhood watch for any community that desires one; I will speak to any group of youth or adults that invite me to discuss ideas to reclaim our streets and to keep young men and women on the right path; I will continue to look for opportunities to remove barriers and encourage witnesses to come forward even if they will only do so anonymously, such as through the Safe2Tell mobile app I unveiled a month ago; and I will work with anyone no matter their life's path that is committed to turning the tide in Kankakee County to break the 'no-snitch' mentality. I know many others, in law enforcement and not, who will do the same. But we cannot do it alone. We need EVERY community to step up, for this "snitching mentality" is not specific to one street, neighborhood, race or color; in fact, it's not even specific to the criminal element — law abiding citizens in every profession are guilty of it. But, that doesn't need to continue and it is something we can change if we work at it. If you want to work at it with me, call me. My direct office line is 815-936-5825, and I am always available on my cell at 815-450-7459.

Let me close with this: Now is the time to speak up, not to sit silent. If you have information about a murder or violent crime, please report it to law enforcement. You can even do so anonymously via Crime Stoppers at (815) 93-CRIME. Your tip could get a murderer off our streets and save a friend or loved one, or even yourself, from being the next victim. There is no shame in that, only honor and the gratitude of an entire community.

Jim Rowe

Kankakee County State's Attorney