

## Virginia Considering Statewide Gang Listing

Written by NiKKi ID1540

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It is no big secret that gang life is part of the hip-hop culture in many areas. Rap artists rap about gangs and gang life; some even rap about their gang affiliations. As members of the hip-hop community we are aware of the status that gang life has in many areas.

Times Dispatch staff writer Kiran Krishnamurthy has wrote this article on a measure being considered by the State Crime Commission in VA.

Prosecutors seeking to lock up street-gang members would have a new tool at their disposal under a measure being considered by the State Crime Commission.

Tattoos, hand signals, clothing and other identifying characteristics of some gangs would be culled from convicts, investigators, prisons, jails and elsewhere under a plan discussed yesterday by a commission subcommittee.

The information would be available to prosecutors, especially those with little experience trying gang members, seeking to prove a defendant is a member of a particular street gang.

Proving a gang connection could enable a prosecutor to elevate a misdemeanor, such as spraying graffiti, to a felony, such as gang participation and recruitment, possibly resulting in more jail or prison time.

"This is something that would be very beneficial to us, especially in Northern Virginia," said Del. David B. Albo, R-Fairfax, a panel member who sponsored the legislation directing the commission to study gang conduct to produce a statewide listing of specific characteristics.

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The gang problem is especially pronounced in Northern Virginia, notably with the presence of Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13. But street gangs also are evident in Hampton Roads and the Richmond area, say various law-enforcement officials and the gangs are migrating into the Shenandoah Valley and Southwest Virginia.

Lynchburg Commonwealth's Attorney William G. Petty, another commission member, said he "doesn't think much" of the state laws that now allow a prosecutor to try to prove gang affiliation by way of clothing or other characteristics.

"We've got guys running around with red-and-blue handkerchiefs hanging out of their pockets, and they call themselves Bloods and Crips. But they're no more a part of the L.A. organization than I'm a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution," he said.

"There is no way, in my humble opinion, that any judge in my jurisdiction is going to buy the idea that just because the L.A. Crips have committed murders, drug deals and everything else that those . . . criminal acts are going to be attributed to some guy with a red handkerchief in his pocket" in Lynchburg, he said.

Starting July 1, Virginia prosecutors can cite past criminal acts committed by gang members outside the state as they seek to prove gang-participation and gang-recruitment cases for individuals on trial, said James Towey of the attorney general's office.

The subcommittee is expected to take up the statewide gang listing again in late summer or early fall.