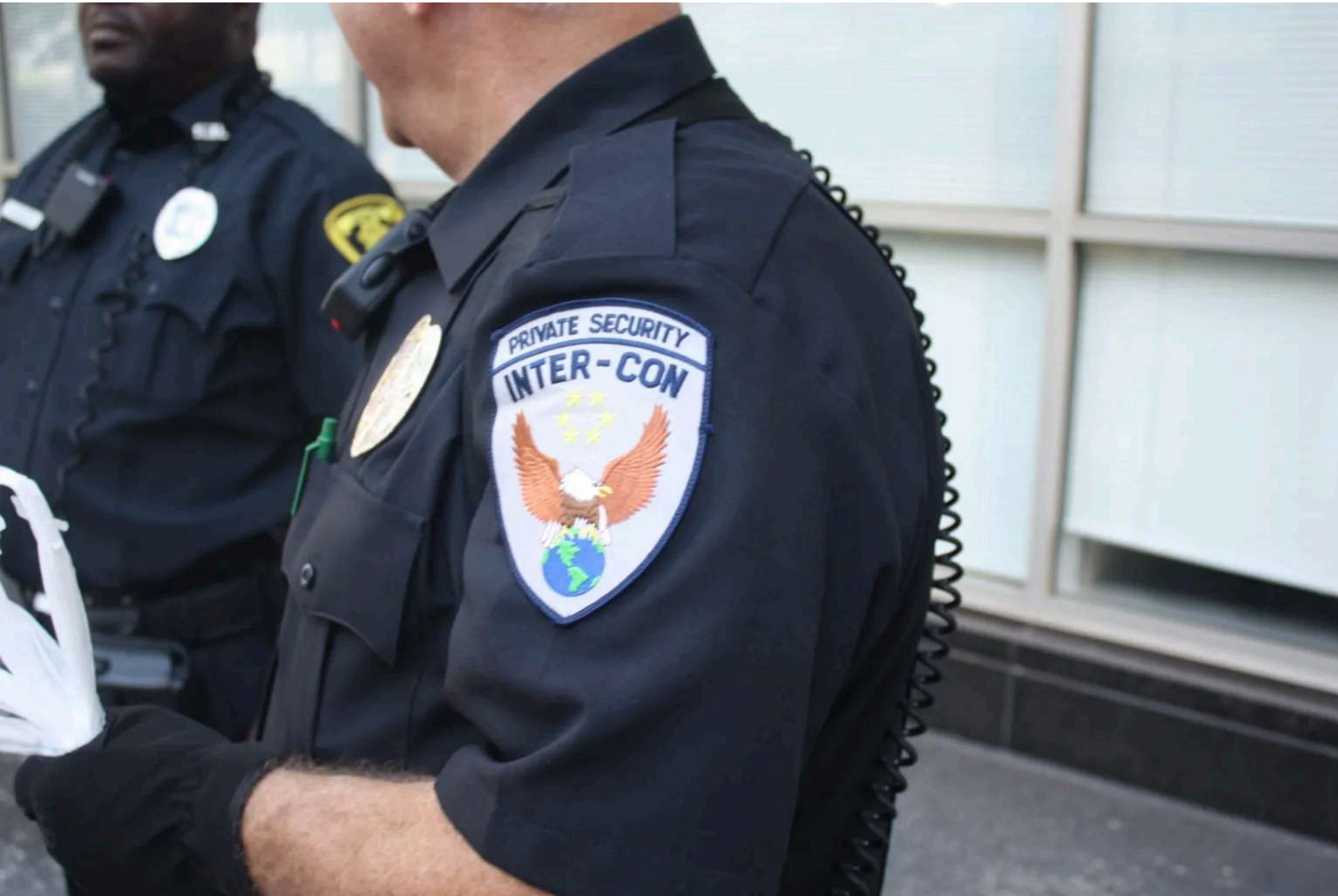


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Inter-Con Security has been filling a third of DART's police ranks for over a year now. | Photo by Sam Judy

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Following One Year into DART Contract with Inter-Con Security, Arrests Associated with Unhoused Demographic Spike

DART property has seen a rise in arrests that surpasses reported Class A offenses. And according to anecdotal evidence from DART itself, it's likely that spike bears a connection to arrests of the unhoused.



by Sam Judy

October 25, 2024

Last year, DART employed 100 transit officers from Inter-Con Security to fill ranks patrolling its stations and trains. However, the change in police staff has coincided with an increase in both Class A offenses and arrests from data released around the same time last year. And while arrests have increased overall, one of the most significant jumps is associated with crimes connected to homelessness, with an increase of around 70% for criminal trespass and emergency detention.

This does not include increases in arrests on other charges that can bear some connection to unhoused residents, such as disorderly conduct, drug possession/use, and public intoxication.



DART Headquarters at Akard Station in Downtown Dallas. | Photo by Sam Judy

Added to an existing force of 200 DART PD officers and 54 Fare Enforcement Officers, Inter-Con Security comprises roughly 30% of DART's police force. Despite incorrectly stating in a press release that their contract with DART was signed for four years to provide unarmed officers (it was for 2 years and security officers *are* armed), Inter-Con seems to be in good standing with the transit agency.

As its \$15.3 million contract has passed its one-year mark, leadership of DART Police previously stated crime statistics would be reviewed on a quarterly basis. But Chief Communications Officer for DART Jeamy Molina tells the *Weekly* that data is not isolated from sworn officers, which makes tracking Inter-Con's conduct nearly impossible.

“The Police Department is measured against the calls for service, number of arrests and average response time. While TSOs cannot arrest people or write tickets, they can enforce the DART code of conduct and our fare policies. They serve as the eyes and ears for the police officer team and the increases in calls for service can be attributed to increased calls from the TSO team who will escalate issues as needed. The recent downward trend in average response time, which is a good thing, correlates to the TSOs being able to respond to lower-level issues, freeing up DART PD to handle other things.” – Jeamy Molina

Molina explains that contract renewal will be determined on the performance of the entire department following its initial signage, rather than the specific performance of Inter-Con Security officers. Previous comments from DART express that they would be evaluating their law enforcement plan to determine whether or not to renew the contract, despite data on performance being surveyed collectively among DART PD and Inter-Con.

Upon review of data collected via DART's website, Class A offenses on DART property are on the rise by around 33%. Arrests, variably, have increased by about 75%. This increase, in both respects, far outpaces crime statistics from the Dallas Police Department. Likewise, Black residents are more than five times as likely to use public transit than white counterparts. And similarly, Hispanic/Latine ridership is more common than white ridership by roughly the same figures.

One of the most significant spikes in a single statistic (a 140% increase) is connected to arrests related to warrants from other agencies.

"It's possible that the increase in arrests is due to arrests associated with warrants from other institutions," Molina says. "Our officers might pull someone aside and pull up their information and find that they have an outstanding warrant, at which point they will be arrested."

Molina also suggested that increases align with greater accessibility in reporting crimes on its property, and campaigns like See Something, Say Something.



Photo by Sam Judy

"One of the reasons we're seeing more arrests is because of the increased visibility of all our personnel, PD, Transit Security Officers, and Fare Enforcement Officers. We're able to see and address more issues," Molina says. "The issues we're seeing on our system are the same as those our city partners see in their communities, which is why it's so important that we work together to address them together."

Violent crime in the city overall has variably gone down, with crime overall largely stagnating with an increase around half of a percent. And while the rise in violent crime on transit is proportionally consistent, most numbers have stagnated or increased by single-digits between quarters. For instance, aggravated robbery is up by 120% from data released this time last year, but this is reflected in an increase to 11 robberies from five. Variably, aggravated assaults are down by 42%.

DART Police Chief Charles Cato previously served as first assistant chief of police in Dallas before taking the role of chief in Mesquite from 2016 to 2021. During his time as chief of the Mesquite Police Department, arrest rates shot to their highest since before 2013 before falling closer to preceding statistics in 2019, according to police watchdog website Police Scorecard.



An unhoused resident takes refuge in the shade near East Transfer Center in the downtown area. | Photo by Sam Judy

As city residents without housing are likely to utilize public transportation to escape the elements, the rise in arrests is overrepresented by the poorest Dallasites in crime data. Jeff, an unhoused resident and rider, states that hostility towards the homeless is on the rise, especially with Inter-Con officers.

“Well it’s partially that there’s just more of ‘em. Homeless folk,” says Jeff, an unhoused resident that’s lived in Dallas since the late ‘70s. “But those contract security people, they’ve been more aggressive with anybody homeless. I don’t think they’re trained as well with the de-escalation as the regular DART Police. Let’s say a DART cop sees someone homeless smoking on the end of the train, or anywhere they’re not supposed to be smoking. They’ll ask politely. ‘Excuse me sir, you mind putting that out,’ they’ll even ask twice if they have to, and most of the time the people listen to them. These contractors? A lot of them will come up real confrontational. They’re more likely to get physical.”

Jeff takes a drag off of a tightly rolled blunt as he continues, exhaling the smoke through his nose while he considers his words. “And you know, homeless people are more likely to be doing drugs. Hard stuff, I mean. If you’re living out on the street it’s real likely you’re not right in the head because of some reason. Whether cause they’re sleeping outside, they’re veterans with issues, they’re on drugs. Do I think they’re ‘targeting’ the homeless? Some of them are,

but that's both the contract people and the DART cops. But as far as I can tell, [homeless residents] dealing with contractors has been more tense."

Kayla, another rider, stated that Inter-Con Security has seemed increasingly hostile to unhoused residents as the contract has progressed in comparison to DART PD. "They have been more aggressive than DART Police to anybody homeless. They haven't been discriminating against me, or other trans people. But they are going after more people that are clearly homeless. And they're intimidating to some people. Like, they got guns."

Some respondents agreed that issues with unhoused neighbors were more common, but stated that there was no distinction between aggression, whether from Inter-Con or DART Police.

Dallas Weekly took comments from several other residents, both housed and unhoused. Seven out of every 10 respondents stated that they've witnessed more tense/confrontational exchanges between the unhoused and security officers compared to last year before the contract took effect. Inter-Con Security did not respond to the *Weekly's* request for an interview/comment.

As the city's homelessness issues continue to worsen, the rising arrest rate inordinately affects the unhoused, leading to higher rates of detention for the demographic. And with distrust potentially fostered between contract security and the most vulnerable residents, Dallas' homelessness issue has the potential to compound further as time marches on.

DART's Board of Directors will review and determine whether to renew their contract with Inter-Con Security early next year.



Jesse, a Dallas transplant and resident living downtown, corroborated accounts of tense interactions. | Photo by Sam Judy