

Martial Law in a small Arkansas town

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Authorities say in an attempt to stop the violence, a neighborhood on the Westside of Helena-West Helena is under a 24-hour, non-stop curfew that could be extended for days.

It's a tale of two cities. The result of what police are calling a small gang turf war. Neighbors Mary Stevens, Flora Commons and Antone Johnson live in the middle of it. "They've been shooting for three or four nights," says Commons. "It's time to put a stop to all the crime.

You can't sleep at night because people are shooting and you want to know where the bullet is going to go next," says Johnson. Mayor James Valley says the impacted area is violence-prone. So from South Sebastian to Fourth Street and Anderson to Garland Street, no one is allowed out. He says it's, "...to curtail some of the general mayhem we've been experiencing, particularly the gun shots," says Valley. "Nobody can walk down the street and be safe, that is, be free from police interference," says Valley.

"I don't think it's right," expresses Stevens. Some neighbors say they're being unfairly punished for the crimes other people have committed. "They know exactly who's doing the shooting, the robbery, but it seems like we're never going to get any justice around here," says Stevens. "We got kids down here. They should lock up these young folks that have been doing the shooting; don't put us hostage or on lockdown," complains Commons.

Assistant Police Chief Ronald Scott says since the curfew was implemented late Thursday afternoon, people are 'sleeping better'. "We've taken some drugs off people, a couple of guns off people," says Scott. Authorities say that is the whole point.

But the ACLU of Arkansas sent Mayor Valley a letter saying the curfew is unconstitutional.

"Imposing house arrest and suspending the Fourth Amendment for law-abiding people is only going to cause more problems for this city," said ACLU of Arkansas staff attorney Holly Dickson. "They need to work with the community to get this resolved instead of treating all of their citizens like criminals."