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LOCAL, 3A

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### MEMPHIS SAFE

## Task Force has nearly 5K arrests since arriving

**Jack Armstrong**

Memphis Commercial Appeal

USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Memphis has seen an increase in the number of National Guard troops patrolling the city at the start of 2026.

Also, arrests continue to climb as the Memphis Safe Task Force enters its fourth month of operation since its arrival in late September.

Here's the latest on the National Guard and the Memphis Safe Task Force's presence in the city.

### Federal judge says caseload 'exploded' since task force began

The caseload in federal court has "exploded" since the Memphis Safe Task Force began operations, said U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee Chief Judge Sheryl Lipman.

On Jan. 5, Lipman swore in 16 military lawyers to assist the U.S. Department of Justice in prosecuting cases brought by the task force, which began local operations in September 2025.

According to Lipman, cases were up

90% in September 2025, up 38% in October 2025 and 325% in November 2025, compared to each respective month in 2024.

The attorneys will focus primarily on violent criminal cases, but could prosecute other cases, too.

### How many National Guard troops are in Memphis?

There are now nearly 400 National Guard members patrolling each day in Memphis, a spokesperson for the Mem-

phis Police Department confirmed on Jan. 7.

That number has grown steadily since the Memphis Safe Task Force began operations in the fall of 2025. In November 2025, MPD confirmed there were 140 to 180 troops on the ground in Memphis, but that those numbers were expected to double.

On Dec. 4, MPD confirmed there were 240-245 guard members in a "24-hour cycle."

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Joel Weinshanker, the managing partner of Elvis Presley Enterprises, Jonathan Redmond, a producer for "EPIC: Elvis Presley in Concert," and Jerry Schilling, a close friend of Elvis Presley, cut the birthday cake together during the ceremony to celebrate Presley's 91st birthday at Graceland in Memphis on Jan. 8. PHOTOS BY CHRIS DAY/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

## Fans from around world celebrate Elvis' 91st birthday at Graceland

**Bob Mehr**

Memphis Commercial Appeal

USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

An enthusiastic group of fans from across the globe gathered on Graceland's front lawn early on the morning of Jan. 8 to mark what would have been Elvis Presley's 91st birthday.

The event honoring the King of Rock 'n' Roll — born Jan. 8, 1935, in Tupelo, Mississippi — came as part of the annual Elvis Birthday Celebration in

Memphis, which kicked off Jan. 7 and continues through Jan. 11.

Typically, fans bear frigid January conditions to attend the morning birthday proclamation and cake cutting, but this year a crowd of roughly 750 enjoyed unusually warm 60-degree temperatures as they were welcomed by the event's host, Elvis Radio DJ Argo.

After a brief appearance by longtime Elvis

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Fans take their place around the birthday cake platform prior to the ceremony to celebrate Elvis Presley's 91st birthday.

## Lee opts out of \$84M summer feeding program

**Vivian Jones**

USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee has opted not to seek about \$84 million in federal food assistance to provide summer food aid to about 700,000 needy children statewide.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Summer EBT program offers about \$120 in food benefits to school-aged children that qualify for federal food assistance and do not have access to free or low-cost school meals during the summer months.

Tennessee was one of 13 states that did not seek the funding in 2025, but several of those states reversed course and applied to participate in the program this year.

Lee did not apply for the funding by the Jan. 1 deadline.

Instead, Lee will seek new funding for the state's smaller-scale summer feeding programs when he proposes the state budget next month, spokesperson Elizabeth Johnson told The Tennessean.

"Gov. Lee's FY27 budget proposal will include further investments in Tennessee's existing summer food assistance programs that effectively reach underserved families while stewarding taxpayer dollars responsibly," Johnson said.

Johnson called the Summer EBT program, which was established during the COVID-19 pandemic to supplement existing programs, "mostly duplicative."

"As a greater share of the cost burden shifts to states, Tennessee is well-positioned to ensure children are fed in the summer months by bolstering our existing programs," Johnson said.

Tennessee's Department of Human Services ran a \$3 million program to offer some food assistance to children in 15 rural counties. The program reached only 18,000 in 2025.

TDHS did not respond to a request for comment from The Tennessean.

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