



CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL

Washington, DC
**Gun Violence
Reduction Strategic Plan**



CJCC SPRING PUBLIC MEETING

**A DISCUSSION OF THE *GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION
STRATEGIC PLAN* PROPOSED BY NICJR**

**THURSDAY, MAY 12
6-8 PM**

Background

On May 12, 2022, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) convened a virtual public meeting on “The District’s Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan”.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed “[Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan](#)” for the District of Columbia, compiled by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR). CJCC commissioned NICJR to develop a proposed strategic plan for reducing gun violence in the District as a follow up to the “[Gun Violence Problem Analysis Summary Report](#),” released by CJCC in the Spring. The strategic plan was compiled based on evidence-based practices and discussions with representatives from various government agencies and community-based organizations in the District.

Ms. Kristy Love, Interim Executive Director, CJCC, welcomed the attendees and commented that the presenter, David Muhammad, is no stranger to the District, given his previous work for the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), and his current efforts as an advisor to the White House and other jurisdictions on crime and gun violence reduction strategies. Ms. Love also acknowledged Ms. Linda Harlee-Harper, Director of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP), who was tasked with explaining how the District intends to implement the gun violence reduction strategic plan. She thanked the moderator, Pastor Delonte Gholston, Peace Fellowship Church, for his ongoing efforts to collaborate with community and community-based organizations (CBOs) to curtail gun violence occurring across the District.

Ms. Love also facilitated a brief poll of attendees to gauge their perspectives on gun violence and what are the most effective approaches to reducing it. (The polling results are provided at the end of this summary.)

Panel Introduction



Pastor Gholston prefaced his introduction of the speakers by stating that the public meeting would entail a serious conversation to address the serious times and circumstances that confront District residents, criminal justice partners, and grassroots organizations engaged in gun violence reduction efforts. He also

acknowledged the presence of Mayor Muriel Bowser and commended her efforts to address the existing gun violence crisis. He proceeded to introduce David Muhammad of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform who was slated to outline the [Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan](#) and its recommendations.

Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan Presentation

Mr. Muhammad started his presentation by providing context on the [Gun Violence Problem Analysis](#) he performed, which was commissioned by CJCC. The analysis explored the dimensions of homicides and non-fatal shootings committed during 2019 and 2020. For context, he stated that while the 226 homicides in 2021 was the highest in recent history, the tragic high-water mark for homicides in the District was 482, which occurred in 1991. Mr. Muhammad indicated that for 2019 and 2020, 92% of homicide victims in the District were African American, although African Americans comprise only 46% of the population. Further, 66 percent of homicide victims/suspects and 64 percent of nonfatal shooting victims/suspects were between the ages of 18-34, with a mean age of 29.5 and 29.8.

Mr. Muhammad shared that in many instances, homicides were precipitated by a petty dispute over a romantic partner, and often the perpetrators are members of a clique or crew, but not necessarily any organized affiliation that involved a leader or hierarchy. A notable statistic of the analysis was that 55% of both victims and suspects had either prior active supervision, i.e., Court Services and Offender Supervision (CSOSA), or Pretrial Services Agency (PSA), in addition to being previously incarcerated or arrested.

Mr. Muhammad outlined the Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan and its three elements: violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. Violence Prevention refers to the elimination or reduction of the underlying causes and risk factors that lead to violence. Violence Prevention efforts are designed to prevent violence from occurring.

Violence Intervention efforts are designed to intervene and prevent the imminent act of violence. Both prevention and intervention hinge on deploying services that identify and address age-and context-appropriate risk and protective factors. Violence Prevention efforts are most often targeted towards children and youth whereas Violence Intervention efforts tend to be focused on the people who are at the greatest immediate risk of violence, and typically includes young adults. While violence prevention is a broad field encompassing various types of programs, effective violence intervention is more defined and narrowly focused.

Community Transformation refers to the elimination of factors that give rise to violence in a neighborhood, i.e., poverty, blight, low performing schools, disinvestment, and chronic unemployment. Community transformation is a long-term strategy that can take 15-20 years to

achieve, and if successfully implemented, it can also be highly effective at permanently reducing violence.

Mr. Muhammad offered 16 primary recommendations tied to prevention, intervention, and community transformation. They include the following:

Prevention

1. Expand upon the CJCC Root Cause Analysis by conducting a longitudinal cohort assessment of young people between the ages of 20-26 who have been convicted of attempted homicide and review their background and system involvement as children.
2. Create a Youth Data and Intervention Initiative (YDII) using real-time data provided by public schools and youth-serving agencies to identify youth requiring intensive interventions.
3. Create Community Resource Hubs that employ a “no wrong door” strategy and leverage existing resources used by District agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide support and opportunities for youth who are most at-risk.

Intervention

4. Implement a comprehensive citywide Gun Violence Reduction Strategy:
 - Data-driven identification of those individuals and groups at highest risk of gun violence,
 - Direct and respectful communication to those at high risk,
 - Intensive services, supports and opportunities,
 - Focused enforcement, which entails shifting efforts away from low-level, petty crimes and increasing enforcement on serious crime and violence.
5. Establish a Citywide Data Information System (CDIS) to track the extent to which persons at highest risk have been served or supervised by District or federal agencies.
6. Institute a “Peace Room,” which is a real-time incident review and response center that is capable of responding to shootings and likely retaliatory acts of violence; within it, conduct “Shooting Reviews,” which are weekly meetings with justice-system agencies to review recent shootings and determine if retaliation is likely; and “Coordination Meetings,” which involve CBOs who will coordinate outreach efforts to persons likely to retaliate.
7. Increase the number of Violence Intervention Workers (Life Coaches/Credible Messengers, Violence Interrupters, and Outreach Workers).
8. Prioritize very high-risk individuals on Life Coach caseloads for government-funded services.

9. Create a violence interrupter (VI) training academy.
10. Immediately begin intensive engagement for the 200+ high-risk individuals identified through the gun violence problem analysis.
11. Create a “Credible Messenger for All” initiative that ensures every youth and adult released from custody in the District is paired with a Credible Messenger prior to release.
12. Fill judicial vacancies in order to expedite backlogged cases.
13. Expand the MPD Violence Reduction Unit.
14. Assign a senior government official to oversee implementation of the plan.

Community Transformation

15. Expand District place-based initiatives, including identifying, requesting, and managing service requests for blight abatement and essential improvements.
16. Establish a Guaranteed Income initiative:
 - The pilot program should select a subpopulation of 200 Black families that have children under 10 years of age, have household incomes below \$50,000, and live in either Ward 7 or 8.

Mr. Muhammad stressed the importance of reinforcing intervention efforts with data-driven performance management and accountability measures because it is critical to verify whether efforts are working as intended, and applying metrics to outcomes can quantify rates of success.

Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan Implementation

Ms. Linda Harllee-Harper, the Director of the District’s Office of Gun Violence Prevention, shared her perspective on the District’s plans to implement the strategy proposed by Mr. Muhammad. She offered that the Plan was not developed in a vacuum and included extensive outreach to community partners and incorporated input from them. Director Harllee-Harper also commented that District residents care deeply about gun violence as reflected by the robust attendance at the virtual public meeting.

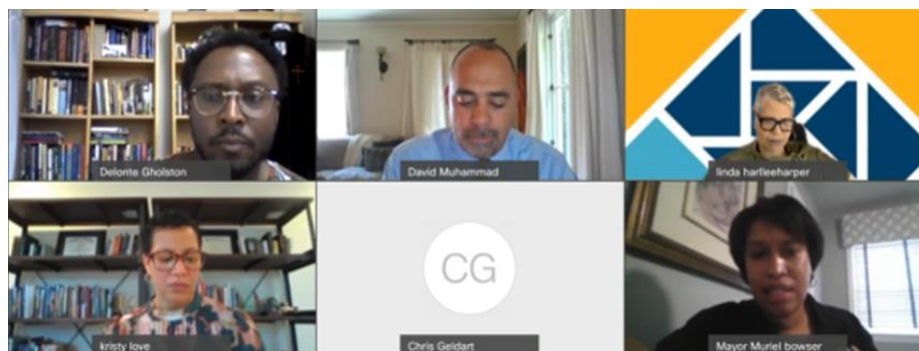
Regarding the recommendations presented in the Plan, Director Harllee-Harper commented that the District has fully embraced the principles and methods associated with Violence Interruption protocols. She indicated that the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) has been at the forefront of outreach efforts and the OGVP has been elevated in function and resides within the purview of the Office of the City Administrator (OCA). Director Harllee-Harper stressed that in order for gun violence reduction strategies and intervention efforts to be successful, they must enjoy the confidence and support of senior officials, and that is now the case in the District.

She highlighted the element of the Plan involving the “Peace Room,” which employs a multitude of community players operating on the ground in collaboration with city agencies and officials to develop appropriate strategies that deliver results. Director HarLee-Harper also stated that across neighborhoods and communities, there is no shortage of talent or knowledge regarding what is transpiring in their neighborhoods. Further, community residents are willing, eager, and able to make a difference to rid their communities of violence.

Remarks from Mayor Muriel Bowser

Pastor Gholston acknowledged Mayor Bowser, who was present at the virtual meeting, and provided her an opportunity to share her perspectives on the Plan, including how implementation of the plan would be funded. Mayor Bowser began by thanking CJCC for hosting the public meeting and Mr. Muhammad for his work on the Strategic Plan. Regarding funding, she offered that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) includes funding to support cities struggling to recover revenues lost due to the COVID crisis, and those funds are being used to support the implementation of the Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan. Additionally, ARPA funding will be used to hire more Violence Interrupters, and to support Promise Rides for returning citizens who require transportation for job interviews or required supervision, hearings, etc.

The Mayor provided additional context and said the infusion of funds flowing to the District will take time to reach the many parties in need of them due to bureaucratic challenges associated with administering the vast amounts that will be available, and will need to be released with integrity and fidelity. However, the environment is favorable, and resources will be available to support implementation of the Plan.



Mayor Bowser acknowledged that it is imperative to fund training for the new cohorts of Violence Interrupters who will be deployed across the District. She also commented that funds will be used to address housing needs for victims of violence who may need to be relocated to alternative and or temporary housing. Those same resources will be used to support Community Wellness Ventures, which is tasked with providing trauma-informed care and mental health services to victims of violence.

Mayor Bowser expressed that it is difficult to quantify specifically how ARPA dollars will be allocated via the budget. She offered that some of the funding will be used to hire life coaches for high-risk individuals, and to support the 200 highly at-risk individuals and their families who could be susceptible to distress (financial, emotional, and physical) if they do not receive enhanced social services and programs. The Mayor provided a ballpark number of \$5 billion to support provisions of the plan and current efforts.

The Mayor also affirmed that Director Harllee-Harper is entrusted with overseeing implementation of the Plan, and collaborating with other District agencies and CBOs. She offered that collaboration across organizations and communities would be vital to ensuring successful implementation of the Plan. Mayor Bowser also cited the critical collaborative work performed by CJCC, which she chairs, as an example of inter-agency and CBO cooperation. Further, she highlighted the importance of information-sharing, and the application of metrics to determine whether procedures, policies, and programs being used are effective and working. Finally, Mayor Bowser emphasized that although gun violence is a very serious problem, the crimes being committed are the result of an exceptionally small number of persons.

Questions and Answers

Pastor Gholston proceeded to pose and entertain a series of questions, which attendees posted in the chat.

How is the work of grassroots and community organizations supported by the Plan?

Director Harllee-Harper commented that her office started its outreach by first working through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which documented who the community members are with know-how and credibility within specific neighborhoods beset by violence. She offered that the creation of the “Peace Room” has enhanced collaborative efforts across government and community partners. Additionally, she added that in order for grassroots efforts to succeed, trust must be established within and across collaborating entities.

Further context was provided by Mr. Muhammad regarding how the interests of different parties were accommodated. He stated that the Plan underwent numerous revisions. He also acknowledged the historical shortcoming whereby funding did not flow to CBOs. However, Mr. Muhammad believes that the landscape for future funding is brighter; and even if some CBOs do not receive government funding, they will remain committed to making their communities safe.

Credible Messengers: Who they are, what do they do, and why is their work is important?

Credible Messengers (CMs) possess lived experience similar to the persons who are at-risk or are victims of violent crime. They possess street credibility, may have experienced incarceration, and are accepted in the communities where they are deployed, because they come from and may live in the same areas where they work. Further, CMs receive extensive training. However, it is generally acknowledged that the valuable work and service they perform requires that they be compensated with a livable wage, which can help deter them from resorting to illegal activity, and keep them employed in the vital roles they have performed in the community.

Who makes up the list of known “bad actors” known to have committed violent acts or predisposed to commit harmful acts? What is the role of Credible Messengers?

There are over 250 Credible Messengers who work on the streets in the District. The CMs/VIs have been given the legal names, aliases, and street names of individuals at high risk of engaging in gun violence. They attempt to acquire information that will enable them to make initial contact with the individuals and begin to cultivate a trusting relationship. Once contact is made, efforts are undertaken to redirect negative behavior contemplated by those persons. The work of CMs/VIs relies on relentless outreach efforts. They are asked to find needles in haystacks and to make a positive difference in stemming violence, and they do.

David, please comment on firewalls relative to the Plan the District intends to employ?

Mr. Muhammad provided an example of a practice employed in Oakland, CA. No one working on the ground, i.e., Violence Interrupter, street outreach worker, or life coach working with persons at risk would be in a meeting with law enforcement. Their manager might attend, but no direct supervisors. The practice described relates to historical and adversarial experiences between persons working on the ground and law enforcement. Therefore, in order to build trust, walls of separation and non-engagement must exist and be adhered to because of past involvement of persons on the ground with criminal justice system and biases that may exist by law enforcement or conversely, by persons working on the ground toward each other. In effect, firewalls must be developed and trust in the persons and process must be established. However, the firewalls will evolve organically and will be tailored to the specific needs and realities of a given community.

Conclusion

Pastor Gholston expressed his thanks to Mr. Muhammad, Director Harllee-Harper, and Mayor Bowser and applauded the work of community partners and the CJCC. He expressed the hope that ultimately the District budget would reveal a blueprint to support the implementation of the strategic plan.

Interim Director Love thanked attendees for their participation and indicated that a recording of the discussion and a summary of the discussion would be placed on the CJCC website.

Polling Results

At the start of the public meeting, attendees were asked to respond to several polling questions related to demographics, concerns about gun violence and their perspectives on different approaches to reducing it. Their responses are below.

- The meeting included 139 attendees
- 60% of respondents were District residents
- 66% of respondents indicated they were concerned about gun violence
 - 70% of all respondents indicated they were extremely concerned about gun violence
 - 24% of respondents indicated they were very concerned about gun violence

Additional Question Responses

To what extent would providing services and support to at-risk juveniles reduce gun violence?

- 58% responded great extent
- 38% responded some extent
- 4% responded very little extent

To what extent will Violence Interruption Efforts (E.g., ONSE, Cure the Streets, HVIP) reduce gun violence?

- 42% responded a great extent
- 52% responded to some extent
- 5% responded very little
- 1 % responded not at all

To what extent will community transformation and development (education, fix blighted properties, income support) reduce gun violence?

- 57% answered a great extent
- 38% responded to some extent
- 5% responded very little

To what extent will tougher penalties for violent offenders reduce gun violence?

- 14% responded a great extent
- 35% responded to some extent
- 38% responded very little
- 13% responded not at all

To what extent will increased police presence in vulnerable communities reduce gun violence?

- 22% responded a great extent
- 44% responded to some extent
- 28% responded very little
- 6% responded not at all