

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
“The Gun Violence Epidemic: A Public Health Crisis” Hearing
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Statement from
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Good morning Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Vaughn Bryant and I am the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Peace Initiatives, also known as MPI, a division of Metropolitan Family Services. Metropolitan Family Services has helped Chicago families meet the hardships of poverty, epidemics, natural disasters, world wars and economic downturns since 1857. In 2017, we formed the Metropolitan Peace Initiatives to put power into communities’ hands and engage residents in participating in the solution to gun violence.

I come to this work having grown up in Detroit, MI. I am the son of a Detroit police officer. I am the product of the Police Athletic League where police officers coached me in football, basketball and baseball before going on to be a fourth-round draft choice in the 1994 NFL draft. I have spent half of my professional career in service to communities.

Prior to my work at Metropolitan Family Services, I spent four years as the Chief Program Officer for the Chicago Park District. I joined the Park District after working on the Violence Prevention Initiative as a Deputy Officer at Chicago Public Schools where I created Chicago’s “Safe Passage” program. Safe Passage was created in direct response to the 2009 killing of 16-year-old Chicago honor-roll student Derrion Albert of Fenger High School. Derrion was caught and killed in a brawl on his way home from school. Safe Passage deploys adult community members to stand along key routes to and from schools during arrival and dismissal times, ensuring students are able to arrive to school and get home safely. The program began with 35 schools in 2009. Over the past 14 years, the program has steadily grown, serving 188 schools and more than 78,000 students across the city this school year.

It is my privilege to introduce you to the Metropolitan Peace Initiatives (MPI), which coordinates, supports and sustains a cross-agency community safety infrastructure, made up of local community-based organizations rooted in the neighborhoods hardest hit by gun violence in the city of Chicago. For the first time in Chicago’s history, organizations with proven community violence intervention (CVI) outcomes across the city’s geographies have come together to build a civilian infrastructure dedicated to preventing violence, delivering a comprehensive set of services to heal communities at the highest risk for violence, and providing opportunities for individual rehabilitation.

In 2015, Chicago endured the Laquan McDonald saga. In 2016, we saw 762 individuals killed by guns and 4,580 individuals shot, increases of 58% and 47% respectively. That led a group of local leaders to establish Communities Partnering 4 Peace, or CP4P. CP4P, convened by MPI, began in partnership with eight community-based organizations, to reduce gun violence in nine

of Chicago's most violent communities. Today, the coalition includes 13 partner agencies active in 27 Chicago communities. The program targets individuals most at risk of perpetrating gun violence or becoming victims themselves. Key CVI services include:

- **Intervention by trained street outreach workers** who 1) engage individuals with a high likelihood of shooting or being shot and 2) create peace and non-aggression agreements;
- **Case management services** to address any social determinants of health;
- **Victim services** to provide supports and safety planning for victims of gun violence and their families; and
- Community-based events aimed at building community safety and solidarity, known as **"Light in the Night."**

We administer the **Metropolitan Peace Academy (MPA)**, a multidisciplinary platform that trains, professionalizes and strengthens the fields of street outreach and community violence intervention. The MPA features an 18-week, 144-hour intensive curriculum, shaped and taught by street outreach workers and subject matter experts and is guided by 14 professional standards.

MPI's model also includes behavioral health, workforce development, civil legal aid and organizational capacity building.

In addition, MPI partners with **Southland Resilience Initiative to Strengthen and Empower (RISE)**, a collaborative of University of Chicago Medicine and Advocate Christ Medical Center formed in response to Chicago HEAL – Hospital Engagement, Action and Leadership – an initiative launched by Sen. Durbin to urge Chicago healthcare providers to bolster their efforts to help reduce violence and address health care needs associated with violence recovery. Southland RISE was created to strengthen collaboration between hospitals and street outreach organizations, with the goal of improving trauma-informed care and support, for gun violence survivors and their families on Chicago's South Side and south suburbs. The MPA, along with the two hospitals, together developed two 4-day cross-trainings that bring together the perspectives and knowledge of both street outreach and hospital frontline staff. We completed our first cohort in June of this year and are excited to begin our next cohort in February 2024.

Since the start of CP4P in July of 2017, member organizations have provided nearly 200,000 direct services to 5,516 participants most acutely affected by gun violence in 69 of Chicago's 77 community areas. CP4P participants are at three-times greater risk of gun victimization than the population of the communities where they reside, and almost at four-times greater risk than Chicago's general population, demonstrating that CP4P is reaching the right people for intervention. Nearly all participants are Black or Latino, three quarters are men, and the average age of CP4P participants is 31.

Leading research by Northwestern University's Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS) estimates that between July of 2017 and December of 2021, a time of rising violent crime in Chicago and the country, communities where CP4P was operating saw

statistically significant, favorable changes in rates of homicides and non-fatal shootings compared to areas without CP4P. CP4P's work resulted in 383 fewer homicides and non-fatal shootings than would have been expected without CP4P.

CP4P's street outreach efforts are making communities safer and saving lives.

As you consider ways the federal government can address issues of gun violence, sustainable federal funding that brings violence prevention to scale must be part of the solution.

Federal funding plays a critical role in enabling comprehensive, effective, and sustainable community violence intervention programs. The importance of federal funding to support CVI work is based on several pillars:

- **National Impact**

Since community gun violence has broader social and economic impacts, addressing it effectively is of national interest. Current federal funding reflects the recognition of this issue's importance at a national level. The creation of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention affirms the national priority assigned to mitigating community gun violence. The creation of the Southland RISE collaborative, inspired by Sen. Durbin's HEAL Initiative, is a testament to the value of frontline CVI organizations to help strengthen and integrate trauma care services with our nation's medical centers to develop trauma-informed care training models. And the DOJ currently funds organizations nationwide to recruit and train professionals for careers in CVI including, but not limited to street outreach, case management and victim services.

- **Addressing Root Causes**

Community violence often stems from systemic issues like poverty, inequality, and lack of educational or employment access. Federal funding should support an interconnected and community-driven framework of holistic programs that address these root causes, such as an employment rate that is consistent across racial lines and leading to long-term reductions in community gun violence.

- **Resource Allocation**

Local communities with high rates of community gun violence lack the necessary resources to tackle these issues effectively. Continued and increased federal funding can further provide the financial support needed for initiatives like hiring and training prospective CVI professionals, increasing frontline street outreach presence and acquiring necessary equipment or facilities. CORNERS has determined there are approximately 21,000 high-risk individuals in Chicago at the most peril of being gun-violence involved. Current earmarked state and local public resources for CVI only enable access to less than 15% of those individuals. And while AARPA funding has been a viable stop-gap measure and has allowed for CVI expansion and flexibility, its looming expiration date presents a doomsday scenario for the necessary scaling and sustainability needed to preserve the presence and impact of CVI over the long term.

- **Community Empowerment**

Proper funding can empower communities to take proactive measures against violence, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local safety and wellbeing.

Traditionally, government has been disconnected from CP4P communities. Particularly in Chicago, a history of slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow, housing discrimination and mass incarceration has taken its toll. Chicago remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Public trust in our institutions continues to suffer because of bad actors among the likes of Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge, found guilty of torturing and coercing false confessions from approximately 120 Chicago residents, many of which were Black and Brown. Operation Greylord is an FBI case where 92 Cook County, Illinois officials faced indictment, and many were convicted for taking bribes for fixing murder cases. The shootings of LaQuan McDonald, Anthony Alvarez, and Adam Toledo have police community relations at an all-time low.

Effective community policing should be more community-driven and less systems-impaired. It requires trustful relationships, between police and those most susceptible to gun violence. The intermediary between police and those most susceptible to gun violence are community-based organizations and CVI outreach workers who have the institutional knowledge of trends, individuals, conflicts, hot spots, and, most importantly, relationships with the actors that don't know or trust law enforcement.

Recognizing that any successful approach to crime reduction includes both violence prevention and a trusted community partnership with law enforcement, CP4P created the Community Training Academy (CTA) along with the Chicago Police Department and other community organizations.

The CTA provides a curriculum for community-based and community-specific trainings for Probationary Police Officers (PPOs), District Coordination Officers (DCOs) and officers recently transferred into a district. Through a 24-hour curriculum, every police district learns to apply a hyperlocal lens to the communities they serve. To date, we have trained 133 police officers across eight police districts since October 2020. Based on the survey results, 95% of the officers trained had a positive experience in the training and recommend all CPD officers complete the training. Additionally, CP4P, CPD, the City of Chicago and the Civic Consulting Alliance are working to codify a professional understanding between Community Violence Intervention (CVI) organizations and CPD.

Law enforcement cannot provide the healing that comes with social services supports and interventions but can work in tandem with the CVI infrastructure that provides options to steer youth and adults in alternate directions. CP4P's community-based infrastructure is a vital part of a larger and necessary crime reduction ecosystem.

- **Emergency Response and Prevention**

Adequate funding ensures that communities have the resources to respond effectively to violence-related emergencies and to invest in preventive measures.

Several years ago, the CP4P Coalition co-designed and implemented a micro-targeting model of hyper-localized, rapid reduction street intervention called Flatlining Violence Inspires Peace (FLIP). Focused on “hot spots” identified by police and street outreach workers, FLIP develops targeted community deployment plans based on real-time needs shared by the Mayor’s Office, local police districts and street outreach. As a hyper-focused public health strategy, a core objective is to cool down hot spots that drive community violence. What started out as a three-month pilot, in nine communities, administered by eight frontline organizations, with 62 hotspots, and 275 Peacekeepers over the last several years blossomed into a year-around frontline gun violence mitigation model in 14 communities, administered by 14 frontline organizations, with 89 hotspots, and more than 500 peacekeepers.

MPI’s Crisis Prevention and Response Unit (CPRU) pilot is a coalition of community-based outreach workers who respond to teen trends and anticipate civil unrest and shootings throughout Chicago. The unit is available 24/7 with the goal of minimizing victimizations and arrests while linking high-risk individuals to community-based supports. The CPRU builds on the FLIP model by employing trusted community members in establishing strong partnerships with local expert organizations and implementing targeted and comprehensive anti-violence strategies.

- **Standardization**

Federal funding can help standardize community violence intervention strategies across different regions, ensuring a consistent approach and enabling successful programs to be scaled up and replicated in other communities facing similar challenges.

- **Research and Evaluation**

Federal funding allows for continuous research and evaluation of violence intervention strategies. This is crucial for understanding what works and what doesn’t, leading to more effective approaches over time.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to answering any additional questions you may have.