

Testimony of
Pedro A. Ramos

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Hearing before the Senate Judiciary and Appropriations Committees
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On behalf of Mayor John F. Street, thank you Chairman Specter and members of the Judiciary and Appropriations Committees for giving me the opportunity to testify here today. Mr. Chairman, your commitment to addressing the issue of youth violence is demonstrated not only by your words but by your actions, such as holding hearings like this one today and providing the leadership to obtain funding to support the City's violence initiatives, like the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (YVRP), which I will discuss later.

We all continue to struggle with the challenge of addressing the growing problem of violence and the devastating effects it has on our community, especially on our youngest citizens. Violence is shattering the dreams and futures of too many children and youth in our city.

A comprehensive and community-wide strategy is needed to address this growing violence. The Street administration has invested heavily in violence prevention programs, and there is no more important priority for this administration than the safety and stability of our children and youth. A significant component of our comprehensive violence reduction strategy is mentoring. My testimony will focus on how current violence reduction efforts, specifically YVRP - which has been tied to significant decreases in youth homicide rates - and the Adolescent Violence Reduction Partnership (AVRP), utilize mentoring as a key component of their approaches.

Although we are seeing positive trends in the reduction of many major crimes, there has been recent growth in violence among youth ages 18-24:

- ? The number of arrests for violent crimes increased by one percent between 2004 and 2005;
- ? The number of arrests for homicide increased by four percent between 2004 and 2005;
- ? The number of arrests for rape increased by three percent between 2004 and 2005.

One of the city's most notable research-based violence reduction strategies is YVRP, which is active in five of the city's 24 police districts. This proven model targets youth who are most likely to kill or be killed and provides them with intensive supervision, mentoring, and support services. YVRP is a partnership among the Philadelphia Police Department, Adult and Juvenile Probation, the District Attorney's Office, the Managing Director's Office, the departments of Human Services, Recreation and Behavioral Health, as well as other partner agencies, both public and private.

The young people enrolled in the program are known as "youth partners," and the paraprofessionals who deliver many of the services, including mentoring, are known as

"streetworkers." The essential elements of YVRP, each of which I will describe in detail, are identification, surveillance, graduated sanctions, positive supports - including mentoring, and gun suppression.

- Identification: YVRP utilizes research-based indicators to identify youth ages 16 to 24 who are most at risk to kill or be killed;
- Surveillance: Streetworkers, police, and probation officers provide intensive supervision (usually daily) to monitor the youth partners wherever they are --in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods;
- Graduated sanctions: When a participating youth violates his or her probation, YVRP swiftly imposes sanctions. Research has demonstrated that the prompt deployment of sanctions can be a key element in deterring further criminal behavior;
- Positive supports and mentoring: Sanctions alone are not enough to deter youth from criminal behavior. YVRP streetworkers help youth partners access a range of positive supports, including educational opportunities, literacy, job placement, and drug treatment. A key component of positive supports is the mentoring relationship between streetworker and youth partner. Streetworkers are from the same neighborhoods and have similar backgrounds as the youth partners. This shared context and experience creates a strong bond between the streetworker and youth partner, increasing the effectiveness of the streetworker;
- Gun suppression: YVRP is working with local, state, and federal authorities to deter both access to, and use of, firearms by young people.

YVRP was first introduced in the 24th police district in 1999 and has since expanded to a total of five police districts. Since its inception, approximately 2,100 youth have been part of YVRP. Given the target population, it is clear YVRP has saved many lives: Through December 2006, only 1.3 percent of YVRP youth partners have either died or been accused of murder. While a single death is too many, the data clearly demonstrate the success we have had mentoring 98.7 percent of our youth partners.

YVRP has been subjected to rigorous third-party validation, and the results are promising: According to research conducted by Public/Private Ventures, in the three police districts where YVRP has been implemented long enough for evaluation, the homicide rate has decreased by between 32 and 62 percent. Although two districts have recently experienced an increase in these rates, it is less than the overall increase in the City's homicide rate.

YVRP is currently funded through a combination of state grants, a federal earmark, City government dollars, and in-kind contributions by government agencies. In FY 2007, the total cost of YVRP operations will be \$7.15 million, over 80 percent of which are grant funds. Assuming that all in-kind contributions and current grants would remain the same, expanding YVRP to another nine police districts would cost an additional \$6.9 million annually.

Given the success of YVRP with 16-24 year olds and the reports of growing violence among younger youth, it is logical that this initiative be driven down to younger youth. Lifetimes at Risk: Young Offenders Between 10-12 Years of Age The Philadelphia Story, a briefing paper published by Philadelphia Safe and Sound, documents that we know how to identify youth at younger ages who are likely to kill or be killed. And we are doing just that through the Adolescent Violence Reduction Partnership (AVRP). AVRP is designed to intervene with 10- to

15-year-old youth at the first sign of serious risk behaviors, connect them with streetworkers, and provide support services to help them re-direct their lives before becoming victims or perpetrators.

For both YVRP and AVR, the streetworker naturally takes on a role of mentor to the youth, encouraging him or her to make positive choices for the future. Natural mentors have been demonstrated to be a positive influence for at-risk youth, a finding that is validated by the success of the YVRP program.

In conclusion, I want to again thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and, more importantly, for your commitment to addressing the violence crisis we battle everyday. I will answer any questions you may have.

The number of violent crime arrests has decreased by 12% between 2001 and 2005: rape arrests have decreased by 24%; arrests for robberies have decreased by 4%; aggravated assault arrests have decreased by 18%.

Sixteen youth have died: thirteen homicide victims, two suicides, and one automobile accident. Twelve have been charged with murder: five have been found guilty, one was found not guilty, one had his murder case withdrawn, and five have open cases.