

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
WORKGROUP TO STUDY GUN VIOLENCE
MINUTES
November 20, 2024

- Members Present

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Co-Chair
Perry Paylor, State's Attorney Office, Co-Chair
Barry L. Stanton, DCAO for Public Safety
Tyrone Collington Sr., Chief, Police Chiefs' Association
Zachary O'Lare, Deputy Chief, Police Department
Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Family Services
Terence Clark, Director, Department of Corrections
Juanita Agnew, The Jayz Agnew Foundation
Dr. Tyreese McAllister, Ayanna J. McAllister Legacy Foundation

- Members Absent:

Dr. Matthew Levy, Health Officer, Health Department
Steven Upathanbhakul, Assistant Sheriff, Office of the Sheriff
Melissa Pryce, Public Defender's Office
Carlesa Peterson, Assistant Director, Department of Social Services

- Others Present:

Rev. Tony Lee, Director, Anti-Violence Project, HOPE In Action
Ricardo Miles, HOPE In Action
Zayd Allahu Akbar, HOPE In Action
Terrance Richardson, HOPE In Action
Euniesha Davis, Director, Office of Community Relations
Courtney Mariette, Deputy Director, Office of Community Relations
Sharon Glaster
Prince Hamn
Jordan

- Staff Present

Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director
Rhonda Riddick, HHSPS Committee Aide
Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney
James T. Walker-Bey, Administrative Assistant
Tiffany Hannon, Chief of Staff to Council Member Oriadha
Melody Arrington, EWD Committee Aide

- **Welcome, Introduction & Opening Remarks**

Co-Chair Oriadha opened the meeting by emphasizing the urgent need to address gun violence in Prince George's County, highlighting its tragic impact on youth and its link to the criminal justice system. The Workgroup was formed to assess the issue and create actionable solutions through policymaking, nonprofit engagement, and resource allocation.

The Co-Chair explained that the group's recommendations would be presented to the County Executive and Council. The Co-Chair thanked members for their expertise and commitment and noted that the open meeting would be recorded and that all presentations and discussions would be made accessible online to ensure transparency.

- **Review Minutes**

The minutes were approved as presented.

- **Presentation:** Rev. Tony Lee, Anti-Violence Project, HOPE In Action
Ricardo Miles, Program Manager, HOPE In Action

Rev. Lee shared his enthusiasm for the Workgroup, highlighting its role in driving proactive efforts to address gun violence in our community. Rev. Tony Lee and Mr. Ricardo Miles presented an overview of HOPE In Action, a gun violence prevention initiative funded by ARPA and other county resources. Now in its fourth year, the program includes three (3) components:

1. **The Hope Collective:**

- Funded 23 nonprofit organizations with \$1 million in mini-grants to address gun violence through after-school programs, mental health services, workforce development, and reentry support.
- Focused on "hotspot" areas identified through police data, including Forest Creek, Suitland, and the Iverson Mall corridor.

2. **Violence Interrupters:**

- Conduct high-risk case management, community canvassing, and in-school programming.
- Activities include over 300 community engagements, 50 family interventions, and support for victims and families affected by gun violence.
- Focus on preventing retaliation, addressing community conflicts, and providing resources to at-risk individuals.

3. Community Impact:

- Over 55,000 residents served since the program's inception.
- Data from 2021-2023 highlights significant outreach and intervention efforts.

The presentation emphasized the program's dual focus on prevention and intervention, recognizing the multifaceted causes of violence.

- Q & A

Chief Tyrone Collington of the Police Chief's Association for Prince George's County inquired about how participants are recruited for the program and whether it has expanded beyond the three (3) areas initially identified.

Rev. Lee explained that the interrupters are full-time, paid employees with benefits. Recruitment is conducted via regular job portals and targeted outreach within communities. Many interrupters are returning citizens, leveraging their lived experiences and community credibility. All interrupters are trained by the D.C. Peace Academy, which connects them to a broader network of violence interruption professionals.

Rev. Lee explained that the program initially focused on three (3) primary areas but has expanded into District Heights for programmatic efforts, such as collaborating with local recreation centers. Due to limited resources (i.e., a staff of nine interrupters), comprehensive service expansion beyond current areas is challenging. In District Heights, programming will be less intensive, focusing on community engagement rather than the full suite of services.

Rev. Lee indicated that scaling the program countywide is constrained by available funding and personnel. Comprehensive violence interruption requires significant time, community trust, and resource allocation.

Rev. Lee explained that there are expansion opportunities. Collaboration with local governments, law enforcement, and community centers can extend the program's reach. Offering programmatic elements in new areas can serve as a pilot for eventual comprehensive programming.

Mr. Barry Staton, DCAO, Public Safety, inquired about expanding to other county areas with crime issues, thinking that it would help offset some of the things we're doing and how effectively the program works with the police in the three (3) current areas.

Rev. Lee explained that D.C. has many violence interrupters, highlighting the disparity with Prince George's County, which has only nine (9). Rev. Lee expressed that there is a resource gap addressing the limited number of interrupters and their distribution in the county.

Interrupters maintain a clear boundary from law enforcement to ensure community trust and avoid perceived police informants. They must be seen as allies of the community rather than

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extensions of the police. Communities where interrupters are active value their presence, especially since many interrupters live in those neighborhoods and understand their challenges.

Rev. Lee explained that the program works with the police as a resource but avoids direct operational ties. While not an investigative arm, interrupters share the goal of reducing violence and are part of the broader effort to maintain safety.

He further stated that interrupters are well-regarded in the areas they serve, contributing to reduced violence. The program complements law enforcement and is part of the more significant effort to address crime.

Rev. Lee highlighted an upcoming program to support families by providing gifts and food to 500 households. This initiative, carried out in partnership with District Heights, McDonald's, and other local organizations, aims to promote goodwill and strengthen community bonds. Upcoming events with McDonald's and WPGC aim to expand the program's recognition across the county.

Deputy Chief Olare of the Prince George's County Police Department raised concerns about the mobility of crime between Prince George's County and Washington, D.C., especially among victims and perpetrators tied to specific neighborhoods. Deputy Chief Olare questioned if their interrupters were assigned to specific neighborhoods or if they operated more flexibly and how often Prince George's County and D.C. interrupters communicate to address overlapping issues and deconflict data.

Mr. Ricardo Miles, Program Manager at HOPE In Action, explained that the violence interrupter program currently focuses on high-need areas in Prince George's County due to a shortage of interpreters. By increasing the number of interrupters, the goal is to cover all neighborhoods in the region eventually.

Violence interrupters from Prince George's County and D.C. participate in the Peace Academy, which provides training and facilitates information exchange. They collaborate to address violence in both jurisdictions, treating the DMV areas as a unified region rather than separate cities, with a collective goal of restoring the entire area. Mr. Miles explained that impact is assessed through live and written testimonies from individuals who share their experiences with the program. These testimonies, including videos sent to Director Davis, provide evidence of the program's effectiveness.

Deputy Chief Olare addressed Drill Rap and youth violence. Mr. Miles explained that the interrupters stay updated on trends like drill rap, where rappers from different neighborhoods engage in conflict that may fuel violence. The team is proactive in monitoring this and works to interrupt the violence quickly, engaging with the involved individuals.

Chief Collington inquired about opportunities in the Bladensburg area for a community member to connect with your organization and become an interrupter, serving as a conduit for broader change.

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There is an opportunity for someone from the community, such as Bladensburg, to become a violence interrupter. However, it's not a part-time or volunteer role and requires significant commitment.

The process involves training that comes with costs, and the goal is to ensure that interrupters are adequately supported and equipped to do the work effectively. The organization is open to discussing creative ways to expand but emphasizes the need for proper resources to support new interrupters.

While community involvement is welcome, the organization aims to keep its resources manageable and ensure that interrupters are not isolated or unsupported. The role comes with risks, so safety and ongoing support are essential to effectiveness.

Ms. Euniesha Davis, Director of the Community Relations Office, expressed gratitude to Rev. Lee, Mr. Miles, and DCAO Stanton for supporting the Violence Interrupter Program under HOPE In Action.

She emphasized that the Violence Interrupter role is not a volunteer position due to the risks involved. Paid positions foster greater ownership and commitment to work. Ms. Davis advocated for innovative, well-supported expansion of the program. She stressed that as data shows improvements, it should lead to increased funding to sustain and grow the program effectively.

Co-Chair Oriadha inquired about the gaps and areas needing attention to strengthen the violence intervention efforts and improve community services.

Rev. Lee expressed the critical need for evidence-based, science-backed models for violence intervention. Many existing programs have successfully reduced violence, and Rev. Lee emphasized the importance of focusing on natural, effective strategies rather than just surface-level publicity.

One major challenge is efficiently identifying and connecting individuals in crisis to the right services. The fragmented system and lack of coordination among agencies make it difficult for those needing support, leading to inefficiencies and frustration for people seeking help.

Acknowledging that many social issues, including violence, stem from poverty, Rev. Lee calls for a more comprehensive approach that addresses not just violence but also housing, education, and employment. Stabilizing individual's lives, particularly in underserved communities, is critical to reducing violence.

Rev. Lee stressed the need for Prince George's County to have a voice in state-level decisions, particularly regarding gun violence prevention, ensuring that state funding and initiatives align with the county's needs.

Rev. Lee points out the disparity between the nonprofit sectors in urban areas like D.C. and suburban areas like Prince George's County. To bridge this gap, the county must find ways to

incentivize and strengthen local nonprofits, creating a robust ecosystem that can effectively support violence intervention and other social services.

Since many issues span borders, Rev. Lee advocates for regional collaboration and partnership between different jurisdictions rather than competing for resources. This would involve pooling efforts and finding creative ways to fund joint initiatives.

Lastly, Rev. Lee emphasized the importance of engaging the business community to reduce violence. Involving businesses in the process can provide additional resources and support, helping to create a more sustainable impact.

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized providing foundational dollars to non-profit organizations rather than relying solely on government funding. She highlights several reasons why non-profits should receive direct resources, pointing out that government systems are often bogged down by bureaucracy, which can hinder non-profits' ability to do practical work. The proposed model suggests empowering non-profits to work with necessary resources while the government can oversee, manage, and evaluate.

- **Review of Consolidated Subgroups**

Co-Chair Oriadha informed the Workgroup members about the revised structure of the subgroups. She explained that rather than holding separate subgroup and workgroup meetings, the following four workgroup meetings will focus on the previously established specific subgroup topic areas. She further explained that each meeting features a presentation (if applicable) followed by a group discussion on recommendations.

- **Identify Next Steps**

A template will be resent to the members and should be completed before the meeting. While last-minute recommendations can be made during the meeting, having the template filled out in advance will help facilitate more efficient discussions.

Requests for potential speakers (nonprofits, agencies, etc.) will be gathered.

- **Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is on Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at 11:00 PM.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately Noon.