

WORKGROUP TO STUDY GUN VIOLENCE
MINUTES
FEBRUARY 19, 2025

- Members Present

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Co-Chair
Perry Paylor, Deputy State's Attorney, State's Attorney's Office, Co-Chair
Barry L. Stanton, Acting Chief Administrative Officer
Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Family Services
Terence Clark, Director, Department of Corrections
Brittany Vazquez, Program Manager, Division of Behavioral Health, Health Department
Shawne Waddy, Assistant Deputy Chief, Bureau of Investigations, Police Department

- Members Absent:

Tyrone Collington Sr., Chief, Police Chiefs' Association
Juanita Agnew, The Jayz Agnew Foundation
Dr. Tyreese McAllister, Ayanna J. McAllister Legacy Foundation
Steven Upathanbhakul, Assistant Sheriff, Office of the Sheriff
Melissa Pryce, Public Defender
Carlesa Peterson, Assistant Director, Department of Social Services

- Others Present:

Vinny Schiraldi, Secretary of Juvenile Services, Department of Juvenile Services
Lisa Garry, Deputy Secretary of Community Services for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services
Olusola Ogunrant, Executive Director of Safety Services, Department of Juvenile Services

- Staff Present

Sandra Eubanks, HHSPS Committee Director
Rhonda Riddick, HHSPS Committee Aide
Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney
Tiffany Hannon, Chief of Staff to Council Member Oriadha
Melody Arrington, EWD Committee Aide

- **Welcoming Remarks**

The meeting convened at approximately 11:00 am. Co-Chair Oriadha began by thanking the Workgroup members for their participation. She stressed the importance of addressing gun violence in Prince George's County and nationwide and highlighted the focus on strategic solutions related to resources, policy changes, and policing. She noted that the meetings are public, recorded, and available online.

Deputy State's Attorney Perry Taylor congratulated the Co-Chair and her team on a successful town hall about the state of schools. He noted that crime statistics in the county have decreased due to collaboration among law enforcement and public safety partners, encouraging continued momentum.

Co-Chair Oriadha acknowledged efforts by the school system and police to prevent guns from entering schools, which contributes to crime reduction. Co-Chair Oriadha expressed optimism about the Workgroup's recommendations and emphasized the importance of collaboration.

- **Review Minutes of February 21, 2025**

The minutes were approved as presented.

- **Focus Topic Discussion Recommendations**

- **Programs & Initiatives**

Co-Chair Oriadha explained that due to scheduling challenges, it was decided to integrate discussions on different recommendation topics into regular meetings rather than forming separate subgroups.

A document was shared to review the recommendations provided, and the discussion centered on Programs and Initiatives to stop gun violence and support impacted families. Future meetings will focus on policy recommendations at both the state and county levels, root causes, and public safety.

- **School-Based Violence Prevention Programs**

Co-Chair Oriadha proposed implementing school-based violence prevention programs, which could take about six months to establish and have a moderate cost ranging from 10,000 to 50,000, depending on whether they are volunteer-based, require hiring staff, or contract with external organizations. She emphasized the potential high impact of such programs in reducing

Gun Violence Workgroup
Minutes
February 19, 2025

conflicts within the school system, noting that youth crime often extends from neighborhoods and social media into schools.

The program would focus on emotional regulation, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution, potentially integrating these topics into the curriculum through workshops and interactive sessions. Co-Chair Oriadha also mentioned contacting the school board chair to gather information on existing programs and identify gaps.

Mr. Barry Stanton, CAO, Acting County Executive Office, recalled previous efforts involving the state's attorney's office and volunteer organizations but was unsure of the program's current status. Concerns about the estimated cost were raised, suggesting it could exceed \$50,000, especially if nonprofit organizations require contracts and funding.

Whether to incorporate the program into the school curriculum or implement it as an external initiative was discussed. It was noted that integrating it into the curriculum would be a lengthy process. As an alternative, a short-term strategy was proposed, involving partnerships with nonprofits to run programs at selected schools, possibly twice a month, with school personnel identifying students who would benefit. Also, it was suggested to engage college students from local institutions to volunteer or intern.

A dual approach was agreed upon: establishing short-term nonprofit collaboration while exploring long-term curriculum integration, starting with a pilot program at one or two schools to evaluate its effectiveness.

Mr. Stanton emphasized the importance of not overlooking juveniles in the correctional facility when discussing school-based violence prevention programs. He questioned the level of gun violence training they receive.

Mr. Terence Clark, Director of the Department of Corrections, indicated that while gun violence education has recently been introduced in the reentry unit for adults, it has not been implemented for youth detainees.

Lisa Garry, Deputy Secretary of Community Services for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, requested that any relevant curriculum information be shared with Deputy Secretary Adina Levi, who oversees DJS's residential program. This would help ensure integration and provide education opportunities for the youth before they return to the county.

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized the importance of including young people in custody in discussions about re-entry, as most will return to the community. She also noted the importance of incorporating these youth into the planning process.

- Community Mentorship Initiatives

Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized that this program could be launched within 6 to 12 months, with low to moderate costs, as most mentorship programs rely on volunteers. The initiative aims to pair at-risk youth with local leaders, business owners, and professionals who can be positive role models.

Co-Chair Oriadha stressed the importance of ensuring the program reaches the youth who need it most, potentially by partnering with the DJS.

Ms. Garry highlighted that investing appropriately in this area would have the highest impact. She stressed that mentorship alone is insufficient for at-risk youth; these individuals need guidance from credible messengers. Through the department's Five Academy Gun Violence Reduction strategy, they work with credible messengers who provide accountability and understanding rather than just traditional role modeling.

Mr. Vinny Schiraldi, Secretary of Juvenile Services, Department of Juvenile Services, emphasized that many youths experienced long gaps—sometimes six to nine months—between their initial contact with the system and case resolution. He suggested focusing efforts on the pre-adjudication group, acknowledging the difficulty in mandating participation but empathizing with the potential to offer support to the youth and their families. He was willing to collaborate, share data, and analyze to find practical solutions.

Co-Chair Paylor expressed an interest in reviewing data and discussing the issue with commissioners, the first judicial officials to interact with youthful offenders. He emphasized the need to examine the need to examine how commissioners approach pretrial monitoring, including different levels of release and detention.

Director Elana Belon-Butler highlighted another group of young people who need support: those without serious charges who may or may not have had contact with the DJS and were referred to the Children in Need of Support program. This program, run through their agency, provides intervention services, counseling, and classes for at-risk youth and their parents. She emphasized that this population would greatly benefit from mentorship opportunities and suggested considering them in the future.

Mr. Schiraldi highlighted the work by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, which analyzed gun violence in D.C. and Baltimore, focusing on identifying the individuals most likely to engage in violence and the specific areas most affected. He stressed the need to target efforts geographically rather than spreading resources too thin.

He offered to share reports from D.C., Baltimore, and Prince George's County that compiled data from multiple agencies, including courts, police, corrections, and juvenile services, to help guide policy decisions.

Ms. Garry mentioned their program, explaining that credible messengers are paid professionals who work within organizations to serve as case managers, mentors, and community-based interveners. These individuals not only guide at-risk youth but also support their families and siblings who may be affected by gun violence.

Mr. Stanton highlighted the existing Hope In Action program, which includes violence interrupters and credible messengers, but noted that its focus is primarily on adults. He suggested exploring whether the program could expand to include juveniles.

The discussion focused on making intentional connections between intervention programs and at-risk youth, such as assigning credible messengers to juvenile detention centers or the CINS program. Concerns were also highlighted about pre-adjudication services, but courts can impose conditions like house arrest or curfews; they typically do not mandate rehabilitative services until after adjudication. However, many families voluntarily accept services when approached by credible messengers.

- Need for Increased Access to Mental Health Services

Co-Chair Oriadha highlighted the need for increased access to mental health services, particularly for young people and families affected by gun violence. She expressed difficulty in finding free or low-cost therapy, especially for families who have lost children to gun violence. She acknowledged the barriers to continuing care even with health insurance. She mentioned Hazel Health, which provides free services through schools, but was unclear on their limits.

Co-Chair Oriadha questioned the availability of continued care for gun violence survivors, specifically low-cost or free options in the county.

Co-Chair Paylor offered to learn more about post-care services from their victim-witness coordinators. He recalled a program called "Survivors of Homicide," which was launched 10 years ago. This program involved group meetings for family members of homicide survivors, facilitated by behavioral health professionals. A contractor likely provided the meetings.

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed a potential short-term solution of recreating a support group for survivors of homicide, which would be more cost-effective than individualized care.

Shawna Waddy, police department Victim service Coordinator, shared that their victim service coordinator works with Café, Roberta's House, and Covenant Place, which offer mental health

services. She offered to gather more information on their services and provide it to the group, suggesting a presentation to learn more about their capacity and potential need for expansion.

- Gun Buyback Program

Co-Chair Oriadha introduced a recommendation for a gun buyback program. She seeks input from law enforcement or public safety on the effectiveness and costs of such programs, acknowledging that some already exist and asking whether they have been beneficial.

Mr. Stanton discussed a gun buyback program previously run by the Police Department. Funding came primarily from churches and some Police Department contributions. Participants could receive debit cards as incentives for turning in weapons. The program's operational aspect, including collecting and destroying weapons, was handled by the Police Department. While the program has seen a decent number of guns turned in, most of them come from law-abiding citizens, often older weapons.

- Youth-led Anti-Violence Campaign

Co-Chair Oriadha discussed the idea of youth-led anti-violence campaigns. She suggested that a youth-led campaign could involve young people in creating the concepts, messaging, and events, with funding to support it. She asked for input from organizations or agencies working with youth on such campaigns or knowledge of other jurisdictions where similar initiatives have been implemented and found to be successful.

Mr. Stanton suggested starting a youth-led anti-violence campaign initiative within the school system, potentially at the high school level. He recommended gathering youth feedback on issues like guns and violence and then using that group to lead efforts in the community. However, he cautions about the safety and perception of having youth lead these initiatives in the broader community without adult involvement. He warned against a situation where a youth might be seen as an informant.

Co-Chair Oriadha agreed with the need for a thoughtful approach, suggesting that youth should be involved in shaping the messaging and ideas for anti-violence campaigns but not be on the front lines. She emphasized partnering with schools, using existing youth councils to pilot the initiative, and allocating resources for emerging ideas. She stresses the importance of understanding how to effectively message at-risk youth, noting that the youth themselves would be the best source of that insight.

Co-Chair Paylor suggested involving college students in research projects to engage with high school students on anti-violence initiatives. He proposed that college students could serve as a buffer between youth and public safety officials, as they are closer in age and can better relate to the students. This approach could help gather insights through written projects or research,

providing valuable ideas while minimizing the feeling of direct interaction with police or prosecutors.

Mr. Stanton recommended taking advantage of the summer youth program, including high school and college students, to participate in this project or research.

- **Identify Next Steps**

Co-Chair Oriadha thanked everyone for their submitted recommendations and acknowledged the great start to the conversation regarding the recommendations. She outlined the goal of having five to ten recommendations per topic and encouraged anyone with additional thoughts to add them to the shared document. The next focus will be on Policy Changes, including state and county policies, to send recommendations to the state counterparts and the County Council.

Co-Chair Oriadha will create a separate section in the document for policy changes and ask everyone to add recommendations before the next meeting.

Presentations were discussed, and offline follow-up will occur to integrate them into future meetings.

- **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for March 19th at 11:00 a.m.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately Noon.

Gun Violence Workgroup
Minutes
February 19, 2025