

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
WORKGROUP TO STUDY GUN VIOLENCE
MINUTES
April 16, 2025

• Members Present

Krystal Oriadha, Council Member District 7, Co-Chair
Tyrone Collington Sr., Chief, Police Chiefs' Association
Stan Moore, Assistant Sheriff, Office of the Sheriff
Lisa Garry, Deputy Secretary of Community Services for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services
Christine Wiseman, Deputy Chief, Office of the Sheriff
Shawne Waddy, Assistant Deputy Chief, Bureau of Investigations, Police Department

• Members Absent:

Perry Paylor, Deputy State's Attorney, State's Attorney's Office, Co-Chair
Juanita Agnew, The Jayz Agnew Foundation
Barry L. Stanton, ACAO
Elana Belon-Butler, Director, Family Services
Terence Clark, Director, Department of Corrections
Brittany Vazquez, Program Manager, Division of Behavioral Health, Health Department
Dr. Tyreese McAllister, Ayanna J. McAllister Legacy Foundation
Melissa Pryce, Public Defender
Carlesa Peterson, Assistant Director, Department of Social Services

• Others Present:

Olusola Ogunranti, Department of Juvenile Services
Seema Gajawani, 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
Shirley Anglin, TIEE Committee Aide

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- **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Co-Chair Oriadha of the Gun Violence Workgroup emphasized her commitment to addressing the gun violence issue within Prince George's County. She expressed gratitude to the members of the Workgroup for their active participation and dedication to developing solutions not only for the county but also for potential recommendations at the state level. She highlighted the importance of considering internal policy changes that could strengthen collaboration with the Police Department and other partner agencies. She also noted that the meetings are open to the public, with all materials, including presentations and documents, made publicly available through the County Council website.

- **Consideration of Minutes**

The March 19th Gun Violence Workgroup minutes were approved as presented, with a motion to approve and a second by Co-Chair Oriadha.

- **Presentation:**

Lisa M. Garry, Deputy Secretary of Community Services
Department of Juvenile Services (DJS)

Ms. Garry, Deputy Secretary of Community Services for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, presented on Thrive Academy, a 2023 initiative to reduce youth gun violence. The program targets youth at high risk of gun violence involvement through an intensive case management model utilizing credible messengers, individuals with shared life experiences who serve as life coaches and violence interrupters.

The approach to violence reduction is framed around three stages: intervention (immediate response and mediation), prevention (long-term mentoring and cognitive behavioral therapy), and community transformation (addressing systemic issues such as education and economic development). Youth participation is voluntary but encouraged; traditional case management remains an option for those who opt out.

Selection for the program combines research-based predictive factors with human intelligence from law enforcement, families, and community services. Ms. Garry emphasized the critical role of credible messengers in providing crisis intervention, system navigation support, and building positive youth connections. The program also creates career pathways for credible messengers valuing lived experience to shift cultural perceptions about individuals with prior justice involvement.

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Ms. Garry emphasized that the program provides a “suitcase of supports” tailored to each youth’s strengths and goals, offering services and tangible resources.

Youth enrolled in Thrive Academy receive fiscal incentives, including participation stipends and work or service stipends, to encourage consistent engagement and reduce the likelihood of delinquent behavior. She emphasized that many instances of youth gun violence stem from economic need rather than an intent to harm, and that stipends help address this root cause.

Thrive Academy also offers college and vocational training support, including paying initial tuition costs and assisting with financial aid applications. Recognizing safety risks for some youth returning to their home communities, the program provides relocation assistance for youth and families when necessary.

Group activities, trauma-informed therapy, and family support services are integral to the program, fostering pro-social behavior, resilience, and community connection. Youth engage in activities such as college tours and teamwork challenges to build skills and positive relationships.

Youth enter Thrive Academy through several enrollment statuses:

- Traditional (while in placement pending discharge),
- Thrive Active (community-based probation or post-discharge),
- Thrive Inactive (re-incarcerated youth, maintaining a relationship with the credible messenger), and
- Thrive Alumni (after completing the program, with gradually reduced support).

Eligibility is based on specific risk factors identified through a 2023 gun violence problem analysis, including prior criminal referrals, school or workforce disengagement, behavioral health needs, exposure to or victimization by gun violence, and referrals based on intelligence from law enforcement or community sources.

Thrive Academy initially launched in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George’s County, and Anne Arundel County.

Ms. Garry provided an update on Thrive Academy’s activities and outcomes in Prince George’s County and the state. Thrive Academy is supported locally by Credible Messenger Mentoring Group (CM3), a nationally recognized organization, which recently contracted Jacob’s Ladder to expand services in the county. Thrive Academy is also being developed for Montgomery, Howard, Dorchester, and Frederick Counties, each with a capacity to serve 25 youth.

Since September 2023, 165 youth have participated in Thrive Academy. Of these, 3% were victims of non-fatal shooting, none were homicide victims, and 19% were re-arrested for handgun possession or use, an outcome considered relatively positive given the high-risk

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population served. The program measures success through reductions in gun-related crimes and victimization, as well as improvements in education and employment outcomes. Over 90% of youth are enrolled in school or have graduated, 9% are in vocational programs, and 24% are employed.

Specifically, in Prince George's County, 39 youth have been served, all male youth of color, primarily aged 16 to 18. Re-arrest rates post-enrollment remain low, with 5% experiencing gun violence (non-fatal) and 77% having no new gun-related offenses. While removing guns from youth is an aspirational goal, the primary focus is on changing youth attitudes toward gun use, encouraging conflict resolution without violence.

In closing, Ms. Garry noted ongoing improvements, including expanding credible messenger staff, increasing capacity for summer 2025, and strengthening referral processes within DJS to ensure timely youth engagement in Thrive.

- **Q&A**

Co-Chair Oriadha inquired about the participation of all males in Thrive Academy in Prince George's County. Ms. Garry clarified that the program is open to girls, but referrals or female participants have been limited. She acknowledged a need to improve coordination with law enforcement and community partners to identify eligible girls better.

Co-Chair Oriadha inquired about the referral process. Ms. Garry explained that while referrals were initially manual, as of February, an automatic referral now occurs when a youth is charged with a gun-related offense. Additional clarification was provided by Mr. Olusola Ogunranti, Department of Juvenile Services, who detailed the post-referral process: after eligibility is confirmed, credible messengers engage the youth and family within 48 hours, conduct outreach, and collaboratively develop a personalized life plan to support the youth's progress.

Other questions concerned whether schools are referral partners. Ms. Garry noted that partnerships exist with the Mayor's Office to identify eligible students in Baltimore City. Still, similar efforts have not yet been fully implemented with the school system in Prince George's County. Instead, outreach will target high-need neighborhoods such as Suitland, Capitol Heights, and District Heights.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked whether the program's current capacity of 39 participants was due to staffing limitations or peak participation. Staff clarified that the capacity is based on partner staffing levels. A second provider will join on July 1st, increasing capacity to 50 participants. It was noted that while there have typically been available slots, recent changes to the referral process have resulted in a waiting list for the first time.

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Questions were also raised about program eligibility. It was clarified that participants must be under active DJS supervision to be eligible for the THRIVE Academy. If referrals are received for youth not currently in the system, staff work to connect those individuals to other available services through community partners.

Further discussion touched on the service providers' broader capacity to assist youth outside the THRIVE program, and the possibility of scaling services based on the total number of youth under active supervision. Mr. Ogunranti estimated that approximately 2,000 youth statewide are under supervision, but specific Prince George's County numbers would be provided separately following the meeting. Co-Chair Oriadha asked staff to inquire about the potential cost to scale up services from the county side, specifically asking for an estimate based on the number of youth under active DJS supervision in Prince George's County who would be eligible for the THRIVE Academy program.

- **Focus Topic Discussion – Recommendations**

Policy Changes and Legislation

Co-Chair Oriadha reminded the members that each has a dedicated tab in the working document to submit recommendations and that they may also raise new ideas during the meeting. Due to time constraints, not all submitted recommendations will be discussed live; the updated document will be circulated by email for review.

- Establish a County Office on Gun Violence Prevention

The office would coordinate cross-agency violence reduction strategies and develop a long-term gun violence prevention plan. The anticipated timeline for establishment is six to twelve months, with an estimated annual budget of \$250,000 to \$500,000. Co-Chair Oriadha described the recommendation as having a potentially high impact by centralizing efforts and improving accountability.

- Implement a county gun violence impact assessment as part of all new development, school, and public safety investment reviews

The goal would be to ensure that, in addition to current assessments for school system strain and public safety response times, projects would also be evaluated for their potential effects on gun violence and community safety. Co-Chair Oriadha emphasized the importance of proactively considering safety impacts in development decisions.

- Develop a publicly accessible online dashboard for real-time gun violence data

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Co-Chair Oriadha noted that while Council Members currently receive a heat map, it was unclear if a public-facing dashboard exists. Assistant Deputy Chief Waddy confirmed a public safety dashboard on the department website, but was unsure if it tracks gun violence explicitly. She will follow up.

Co-Chair Oriadha asked whether gun violence offenses are prioritized in prosecution, given staffing challenges. Assistant Deputy Chief Waddy confirmed that the Department maintains a strong relationship with the State's Attorney's Office and that prosecutors are assigned explicitly to gun violence cases.

- Establish a Task Force with neighboring jurisdictions to combat illegal gun trafficking

Assistant Deputy Chief Waddy explained that coordination occurs at the command level and among investigators. Chief Colington added that a robust allied investigators' network is in place, along with a strong partnership with ATF and other federal and local agencies to link gun violence cases across jurisdictions in real time.

- **Identify Next Steps**

Co-Chair Oriadha reminded the members to submit additional recommendations offline and review materials before the next meeting, which is scheduled for May 16th. She noted that the Workgroup is nearing the finish line, with plans to collect all recommendations, hold a meeting to vote on them, and then begin drafting the final report for submission to the Administration and County Council. She emphasized that these remaining meetings are crucial for final discussions and thanked all participants for their commitment and contributions to addressing this important issue.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately noon.