



June 28, 2021

Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: City Council Bill 21-0049R
Investigational Hearing - Existing Alternatives to Policing Strategies**

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council:

The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) appreciates the opportunity to discuss the City's existing alternatives to policing strategies. MONSE is committed to developing and improving strategies to reduce violence and reduce harm to communities by empowering community-based alternatives as the option of first resort. While law enforcement is a valuable partner for many crime reduction efforts, there is broad agreement that Baltimore cannot arrest its way out of this violence epidemic. The overreliance on police to reduce violence and strengthen community safety has not only failed to yield sustainable results; it has also come at an extremely high social cost to many of the city's most vulnerable communities. At the core of MONSE's mission is to focus on the prevention of violence and the promotion of healing through an equity-based, community-led, and trauma-informed approach.

MONSE is in a unique position to discuss the wide array of existing and planned violence prevention strategies which do not rely solely on law enforcement. In addition to inviting MONSE, City Council Bill Resolution 21-0049R invites representatives from programs which MONSE either manages or serves as a primary coordinating partner. MONSE operates the Safe Streets violence intervention program, coordinates the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) with the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) and State's Attorney's Office (SAO), and manages the relationship with GVRS service partner ROCA. While MONSE is not part of the 911 Diversion Program pilot, we will help with the expansion of the program after the pilot is completed.

Since our valued partners at ROCA have been invited to present before the City Council, this report will focus on Safe Streets, GVRS, and coordinating efforts to reduce violence using a public health approach.

Safe Streets

Since 2007, Safe Streets has been Baltimore's flagship gun violence reduction program. Founded in 2000 by epidemiologist Dr. Gary Slutkin, Cure Violence is a public health approach that uses trusted messengers in the community to interrupt the transmission of violence. Violence interrupters spread anti-violence messages and encourage positive changes



Safe Streets Expansion

McElderry Park – 2007
Cherry Hill – 2008
Park Heights – 2013
Sandtown – 2016
Belair – 2019
Brooklyn – 2019
Penn North – 2019
Franklin Square – 2019
Woodbourne – 2019
Belvedere – Launching 2021

in individual behavior as well as community norms around violence. In 2007, the Cure Violence model pioneered in Chicago came to McElderry Park in East Baltimore. Later this year, Safe Streets will be adding its tenth site: Belvedere.

How many people does it serve?

Safe Streets serves the residents of 10 target areas across Baltimore City, totaling 2.6 square miles.

How has Safe Streets contributed to crime reduction?

Past evaluations of the program from Johns Hopkins have found that Safe Streets sites are associated with decreases in fatal and nonfatal shootings, both in the sites' target areas and the area immediately surrounding the sites. In 2020, Safe Streets sites mediated over 2,300 conflicts. Last week, the Cherry Hill site celebrated over one year without a firearm homicide in their target area.

How are communities responding to these programs?

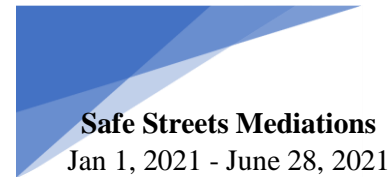
A core piece of Safe Streets' model is community mobilization. Sites host events and conduct daily outreach to share information, build trust with community members, and spread the Safe Streets message via credible messengers. Safe Streets sites are regarded as trusted community hubs to access resources and conflict mediation services. In 2020, Safe Streets sites hosted 451 community mobilization events with 58,000+ total attendance.

What does it take to expand to full scale?

Expansion at the community level will require additional administrative and site staff. When the expansion began, the program recommended that all Safe Streets Sites need increased staffing levels to address the volume of violence in the city. Adequate staffing is required in order to provide proper coverage and ensure outcomes. Three MONSE staff members currently provide administrative support for all ten sites: Deputy Director, Data Analyst, and Community Liaison. In addition to these existing positions, expansion would require MONSE to account for the provision of:

- Workforce Development & Education Coordination
- Training Coordination
- Mental Health Supports
- Community Liaisons
- Life Coaching
- Expanded Community Outreach
- Peer Recovery Support

Full scale implementation of a comprehensive violence intervention ecosystem requires a significant investment in both Baltimore's flagship program and other community-based violence prevention programming. Mayor Scott has been clear about his intentions to provide the appropriate funding to support the work necessary to intelligently scale.



Belair-Edison - 104
Belvedere - 49
Brooklyn - 177
Cherry Hill - 196
McElderry Park - 107
Franklin Square - 114
Park Heights - 54
Penn-North - 127
Sandtown - 110
Woodbourne - 66
Total – 1,104

What are the challenges to meeting goals?

Safe Streets has expanded from four sites and 32 staff to ten sites and 76 staff, not including Hospital Responders. Despite this expansion, the administrative team still consists of just three people. The program hires unique community members who have many professional development needs. Many of the community-based organizations who hire the staff directly require much of the administrative teams' time for capacity building and technical assistance, which reduces the City's ability to train and monitor the efficacy of the work on the ground.

Inadequate staffing of the administrative team has resulted in capacity challenges that have slowed the program expansion, reduced oversight, and jeopardized funding streams. Safe Streets Baltimore also requires in-house resources to access housing, workforce development, employment opportunities, substance use treatment, and mental health supports. Currently, the program relies heavily on each community-based organization that is selected to directly employ the staff to provide connections to these resources, which has resulted in inconsistency across the program regarding supports available to the community. Additionally, training costs need to be built permanently into the operating costs of Safe Streets budget. Examples of training needs for staff include interruption and outreach worker training, financial literacy, in-house GED classes, computer classes, and trauma-informed care training.

Safe Streets is starting an intensive internal evaluation to identify ways to improve the levels of service and outcome provided by the ten sites. Using state funds, MONSE has contracted with Dr. Joseph Richardson, Acting Chair of the African-American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, and Dr. Daniel Webster, Director of the Center for Gun Violence Prevention and Policy at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, to also evaluate Safe Streets and recommend steps for updating the model and integrating an improved Safe Streets into an ecosystem of care to address violence in our communities.

Group Violence Reduction Strategy

In partnership with BPD and the State's Attorney's Office, MONSE is preparing to launch the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS). This proven strategy aims to address the norms perpetuating violence in Baltimore by focusing resources on individuals identified as being at the highest acute risk of involvement in non-fatal shootings and homicides. GVRS, also known as focused deterrence, is a nationally recognized approach that has the strongest formal evaluation record of any violence prevention initiative designed to reduce homicides and non-fatal shootings.

In 2020, MONSE, SAO, and BPD announced plans to jointly implement the strategy in Baltimore City. In addition to BPD shifting significant resources to the tune of seven figures to properly staffing the strategy, nearly \$900,000 has been raised from the philanthropic community specifically for GVRS implementation. Funders include Baltimore Community Foundation, Abell, Goldseker, Annie E. Casey, Open Society Institute, and Johns Hopkins University. A portion of these funds are going to local community-based organizations focused on providing intensive services to individuals identified as the highest risk of being involved in gun violence.

An additional \$2.9 million is being spent in just the first year of GVRS through a combination of city, state, and federal Project Safe Neighborhood funds. Of the \$2.9 million, \$2.1 million is going to Youth Advocate Programs and ROCA, our primary service partners. The remaining funds support MONSE's oversight and coordination efforts, technical assistance from the nation's best experts, and training needs.

GVRs cannot be classified as an alternative to policing strategy since it requires difficult intelligence-led policing and enforcement, but this strategy is successful when properly implemented because it leverages an intentional collaboration between law enforcement, social services, and community members, who collectively co-sign and deliver the anti-violence message. The success of GVRs hinges on the partnership's ability to correctly and effectively deliver this message, which has three core parts:

- Everybody needs and deserves to be safe;
- There's a very small number of people in the affected communities at extremely high risk for violent victimization and, sometimes, violent offending. GVRs is designed to keep them safe, alive, and free;
- GVRs puts together an intense focus on that small number of people in order to support them in their daily lives, communicate community norms in support of everybody's safety and success, and where necessary create swift, certain, and legitimate sanctions for violence.

In partnership with SAO and BPD, MONSE submitted a request to Senator Van Hollen to allocate funds to GVRs from the Congressional District Spending program. We will continue to engage the philanthropic community and apply for federal grants to support the strategy.

Coordination Efforts

While Safe Streets and the Group Violence Reduction Strategy are MONSE's two high-profile violence reduction strategies, it's important to note that part of MONSE's daily work is to engage, empower, and align public agencies and community partners—the whole weight of Baltimore—in the broader pursuit of increased public safety with more justice and less harm. The Public Safety Advisory Commission and Violence Prevention Task Force are just two examples of how MONSE views increased coordination and cooperation as necessary to improving public safety.

Public Safety Advisory Commission

Addressing historic distrust between community and police is essential for violence reduction. The Public Safety Advisory Commission is a diverse group of City residents from each police district, representatives from various communities such as the LGBTQ and Latinx communities, police officers, and government officials, including Chairman Conway. This new commission is tasked with building trust with all Baltimoreans, with an emphasis on improving interactions with marginalized communities. City Council will receive a report on November 15, 2021 with recommendations about improving interactions and relationships with police officers and youth, returning citizens, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ and Latinx communities, public housing and unhoused residents, and victims of domestic violence. The report will also provide ideas for resident-involved training of police officers, partnering with HBCUs, and increasing recruitment of City residents as police officers.

Violence Prevention Task Force

In order to sustainably reduce gun violence and address its root causes, the City Council led by the then Council President Brandon M. Scott passed the Biennial Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan Ordinance 20.364B on May 18, 2020. The Ordinance mandated the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) to develop a comprehensive violence prevention plan that employs a public health approach and strategies that are trauma-informed, reduce harm, and heal individuals and communities.

On September 17, 2020, Baltimore City Commissioner of Health, Letitia Dzirasa, MD, convened the Violence Prevention Task Force (VPTF). Over the course of eight sessions, Baltimore City agencies and

organizations, state agencies, and federal government technical assistance partners developed a Violence Prevention Framework. This framework helped inform MONSE's Violence Prevention Strategic Plan, a draft of which was previously shared with the City Council and we look forward to sharing the final version in the coming weeks.

BCHD has turned over the responsibility of managing the VPTF to MONSE. We have expanded the VPTF membership beyond only the legislatively-mandated agencies to include other agencies, community partners, and residents. The first meeting of the expanded VPTF is scheduled for July 21, 2021. VPTF goals include implementing violence reduction strategies in collaboration with partner, provide ongoing training and technical assistance to programs and services, and collect data and review results from performance measures and indicators. This task force will provide an annual report for the Mayor, City Council, and the public.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S Jackson". The signature is stylized with large, overlapping loops for the letters "S" and "J".

Shantay A. Jackson
Director, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

cc: Sunny Schnitzer, Deputy Mayor, Public Safety
Nina Themelis, Legislative Liaison, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
Natasha Mehu, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations