

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

LO25-0005

Crime Reduction and Violence Prevention

Public Testimony



Testimony for Submission to the Baltimore City Council Public Safety Committee
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Though today's Council hearing is a regularly scheduled oversight meeting, recent developments make it a particularly timely opportunity to discuss the state of public safety in Baltimore. I offer this perspective in support of both the Council's oversight function, and of all partners convened today and across the city playing a pivotal and interconnected role in this work. I seek to honor recent progress and call attention to the urgency and stakes of protecting it. I welcome any follow up questions or additional opportunities for dialogue on any matters addressed below.

Baltimore's historic declines in violence did not happen by accident or overnight, as this body knows well. They have been fueled by unprecedented partnership and investment—at the city, state, and, until recently, federal levels—in treating violence as a public health issue and building a coordinated ecosystem of responses.

This progress reflects years of education, trust-building, and culture change across institutions that once relied almost exclusively on police, prosecution, and incarceration as the only public safety strategy. That approach was not only ineffective; it was deeply harmful to over-policed communities and to trust in the systems purporting to keep us safe. It centered the criminal justice system as the primary tool of safety while failing to address the complex needs of the victims and communities most impacted by crime, as I and others have [documented extensively in Baltimore](#) and beyond.

What has made Baltimore a national example is a hard-earned shift toward a more holistic, collaborative, trauma-responsive approach. One that invests in community violence intervention (CVI) and crime survivors, and which pairs accountability with support. One that recognizes that real accountability is not synonymous with punishment, and that punishment alone can't yield the type of accountability capable of interrupting cycles of harm.

This works only when systems operate with mutual respect, shared responsibility and clear roles. This includes the recognition that even the success of law enforcement partners to close and prosecute cases depends on strong community partnerships and trust. It requires law enforcement to recognize that they do not hold all the tools or the answers, and that there are important reasons that community based organizations and particularly CVI partners may need

to actively *not* share certain information with criminal justice system actors in order to protect the trust and wellbeing of those they're working hard to keep safe and alive.

For these reasons and more, informed by many areas of my work, including the privilege I had while still at the U.S. Department of Justice to lead a collaborative assessment of the response to Black victims of gun violence in Baltimore, and the 91 page report that followed detailing the ways we fail victims and communities, and offering numerous solutions, I am deeply concerned by the announcement by the State's Attorney's Office intending to end coordination with the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE). This decision, accompanied by public statements casting public doubt on the integrity of critical partners, reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of key components of violence reduction. It risks undermining the very partnerships that have helped deliver some of the biggest reductions in violence in the US. It risks critical progress in Baltimore and in the state more broadly toward more accessible, equitable access to victim services and compensation.

All of this requires more coordination, not less. If law enforcement feels they have legitimate concerns that impact their prosecution responsibilities, they must engage with MONSE and partners throughout the CVI and victim services community to find collaborative solutions, not shut them out. This work entails complex and, in some cases, novel issues, but examples in other jurisdictions throughout the country demonstrate they can be worked out through diligent engagement and partnership. For example, New Jersey [recently showed](#) how police and prosecutors can come together with CVI professionals to advance the common goal of reducing violence. The New Jersey Attorney General convened a working group made up of law enforcement and CVI professionals to create a framework for coordination. Following this group's recommendations, they then issued official guidance to prosecutors and police around this coordination, and addressing the issue of information sharing—an area of concern for the State's Attorney—and clarifying how this must be guided by critical principles that promote the safety and trust of CVI organizations and their staff, as well as client anonymity. There are other jurisdictions that our center and our partners at the [Community Violence Legal Network](#) would be happy to connect and lift up as additional models of coordination achieved as a product of facilitated conversation between key public safety partners, not the termination of it.

At a moment when the federal administration has decimated essential funding for proven community safety strategies—cutting over \$1 billion, including at least \$8 million in cuts to CVI in Baltimore alone—we cannot afford division or unforced errors. These resource challenges are further compounded by federal attacks on vulnerable communities at the highest risk of violence, disparaging of our state and local leaders by members of the administration, and regressive swings in federal policy and narrative toward failed “tough on crime” approaches of the past. We have a lot of work yet to do, but our current progress is something to be truly proud of, and has the entire country paying attention to the ingredients of this historic success. This progress is already under threat, and sustaining it depends on our ability to stay united and committed to our shared goal of saving lives.