

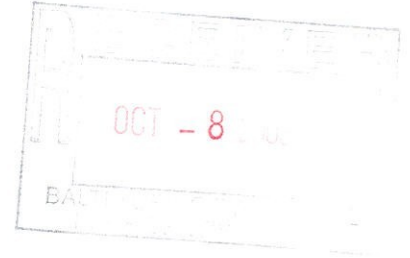
CITY OF BALTIMORE

SHEILA DIXON, Mayor



MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

334 City Hall
Baltimore, Maryland 21202



TO: The Honorable Stephanie Rawlings Blake
and Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 400 City Hall,
100. N. Holiday Street
Attn: Karen Randle

FROM: Sheryl Goldstein, Director, Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice

DATE: October 8, 2009

RE: City Council Bill No. 09-0130R

City Council Bill No.: **09-0130R – Information Hearing – The Status of
Baltimore City's Gang Violence Reduction Activities**

Reducing gang violence in Baltimore requires a citywide effort including local, state and federal agencies, social service providers, community agencies, faith-based groups, neighborhood associations, community leaders, residents and youth. Baltimore is employing a multi-faceted approach to combat violent crime and gangs which contains the following components:

1. Targeting the Most Violent Offenders
2. Getting Illegal Guns off the Streets
3. Violence Prevention through Outreach, Community Partnership and Service Delivery

This approach is also embodied in the foundation of the City's Gang Violence Reduction Plan, which was adopted by the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council in November 2006 and specifically focuses on five priorities: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression and organization change and development. Since this plan was adopted, its key recommendations have been implemented.

In order to reduce gang violence, criminal justice agencies must have real-time, accurate information about gangs. The Baltimore Police Department's Gang Intelligence Unit utilizes the most highly evolved enforcement strategies of any jurisdiction in the State. This centralized unit gathers and disseminates gang intelligence information to all of Baltimore City's police districts as well as other jurisdictions, the Department of Juvenile Services, Parole and Probation, the

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Division of Corrections, School Police and federal law enforcement. Each police district has a gang liaison officer that works closely with the intelligence unit to share information.

Although locally-based street gangs have existed in Baltimore for decades, the gang presence has become more pervasive in recent years as national, established gangs have strengthened their foothold and incorporated smaller independent street-corner gangs. This stronger presence has been accompanied by an increase in gun violence. In addition, the greater involvement of youth in these groups and the related increase in youth violence is a growing concern. Gang members have been identified in each of the nine police districts and gang graffiti exists in almost every neighborhood in Baltimore. The Baltimore Police Department estimates that there are approximately 45 known criminal street gangs with more than 2,100 members, including over 990 Blood and 375 Crip members. There is also a prison gang presence with approximately 150 gang members in the Baltimore City Detention Center. The stronger presence of gangs is also represented in Baltimore's schools with an estimated 60 gangs in city high schools, comprised of 550–600 members, and an additional 600 gang members in elementary and middle schools throughout the city.

In order to reduce gang violence, Mayor Dixon's administration has employed a two-pronged approach – enforcement and suppression thought targeted enforcement aimed at reducing gang violence and outreach and service delivery through initiatives like Safe Streets and EXILE.

Through Baltimore EXILE, the Baltimore Police Department, the State's Attorney's Office for Baltimore City, the United States Attorney's Office, federal law enforcement agencies, the Division of Parole and Probation of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and other partner agencies work together in a unified, comprehensive enforcement strategy that focuses on the most serious offenders in the City. In partnership with Mayor Dixon's Administration, EXILE focuses on dismantling gangs and street "crews" whose trade is guns, drugs, and violence. The Baltimore EXILE partner agencies work with the Mayor's Office to implement and support this highly effective strategy, with a particular emphasis on communicating to gang members that acts of violence by individual members will result in significant legal consequences for the entire group.

As a result, in 2008, there were 123 federal indictments charging 209 violent offenders that will result in significant prison sentences. This represents a nearly 70% increase in federal prosecutions of violent offenders since 2005, the year before EXILE began. And, since February of 2008, there have been three major gang indictments leading to the arrest of 86 defendants associated with gangs driving violence in the City. Three gangs targeted by these indictments are the TTP Bloods, the PDL Bloods and the Black Guerilla Family.

In addition to this targeted enforcement effort, EXILE has a strong outreach component. EXILE utilizes “call-ins” to communicate this message to violent offenders living in communities throughout the City. Community leaders attend “call-ins” to set community standards by telling offenders that the community needs them to become productive, contributing members and that violence is wrong and will not be tolerated. Along with social service providers, they offer another path -- opportunities and tools for success. Job training, education, employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, mental health services and recreation are all made available to those who attend. City and State agencies, non-profit social service providers, churches and community groups come together to make these services available on a priority basis to this group.


Last summer, this strategy was implemented in the Park Heights neighborhood. The most violent offenders were targeted for arrest and prosecution and their associates were invited to a “call-in.” As a result of EXILE efforts targeting Park Heights, the majority of violent offender targets were successfully arrested and prosecuted and violence in the Park Heights community decreased. Since the initiative began in February 2008, 32 cases have been charged (16 felonies and 16 misdemeanors) and 5 have been adopted by the United States Attorney’s Office. As a result, the number of homicides and shootings in Park Heights has been significantly reduced compared to the same period last year. There was a 30% percent reduction in homicides and a 40% reduction in shootings.

An outreach worker, originally from the Park Heights neighborhood, was hired to follow up with “call-in” candidates and secured a range of social services for them and their families including tutoring, job skills training, substance abuse treatment, housing, and employment. Just over half of the candidates who attended the call-in took advantage of one or more services offered – primarily career services and/or GED tutoring. As of September 2008, only 3 of the candidates had been rearrested — all for drug charges

This year, Baltimore EXILE's VRO initiative and "call-in" program will continue to operate in coordination with the City's successful Operation PROTECT program, in which law enforcement and social services agencies work together with community members to help take back their neighborhoods from violent gangs and drug dealers. A "call-in" was held in September in the Gilmor Homes area in the Western District and one is planned for the Eastern District in early next year.

Mayor Dixon's Administration has also launched and invested in Safe Streets. Safe Streets is a community mobilization and outreach program designed to combat shootings and homicides. It replicates CeaseFire Chicago, a highly successful program created by the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The intervention targets at risk youth and gang members aged 14 to 25 through outreach and service connection and targets the community as a whole through a media campaign and community mobilization. The program uses proven public health methods to create behavior change through repetitive prevention messages and concrete services that support and give credibility to the message. In its first year of operation in high violence communities in Chicago, CeaseFire achieved reductions in shootings of between 25% and 67%. The Baltimore City Health Department oversees the implementation of Safe Streets in four sites – three in East Baltimore and one in Cherry Hill. Preliminary results from a Johns Hopkins University evaluation are promising and indicate that Safe Streets is having an impact reducing violence.

Reducing gang violence is critical to the City's overall efforts to reduce violence and improve public safety. Mayor Dixon's administration remains committed to addressing this issue by supporting innovative, evidence and community based strategies to prevent and mitigate gang violence.



Sheryl Goldstem
Director
Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice