



August 15, 2022

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

**RE: City Council Bill 22-0111R
Informational Hearing - Addressing Youth Violence in Baltimore City**

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council,

The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) has reviewed Council Resolution 22-0111. This resolution calls for an informational hearing to discuss the increase in youth violence across the city and discuss risk factors. In preparation for this hearing, MONSE convened City agencies to discuss individual and collaborative efforts to address youth violence.

School-Based Violence Prevention and Intervention Programming

MONSE is working to foster an expanded Community Violence Intervention (CVI) ecosystem, with a core component being refining and building on Baltimore's existing conflict mediation and violence intervention programming. The City will establish contracts with trusted grassroots organizations engaged in violence intervention, like We Our Us, and stand-up school-based violence intervention programs.

In partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools, MONSE will pilot school-based violence intervention in three public high schools over the 2022-2023 school year, based on youth violence data.

To contribute to the development of healthy conflict resolution skills, MONSE is making \$234,400 available to community-based organizations for the 2022-2023 school year who provide social-emotional learning (SEL) and development programs to children in elementary and middle school. This programming seeks to develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in young people.

Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) – Roca

Intensive life coaching is one important part of CVI programming. It refers to the process of checking in and maintaining contact with a person at high-risk, typically multiple times a day. This work has been conducted informally by many community-based organizations across the city.

In 2018, the City of Baltimore entered a multi-year contract with Roca to provide comprehensive services, including life coaching, to people between the ages of 16-24. In 2021, MONSE introduced life coaching into the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) model. Roca provides services to the younger at-risk population between the ages of 16-24 as a part of the strategy.

Interagency Coordination - Child Fatality Review

The Child Fatality Review (CFR) is an action-oriented, collaborative process that brings key people and agencies together to discuss the circumstances leading to a child's death and the community's response to that death. The goal of CFR is to conduct comprehensive, multidisciplinary reviews to better understand how and why children die and use the findings to take action that can prevent other deaths and improve the health and safety of children. MONSE is honored to serve with the Child Fatality Review team, which includes the Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore Police Department, Baltimore City Public

School System, Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Services, and community-based partners like the Center for Hope.

In the past five years, 208 children died in Baltimore City. Through the Child Fatality Review process, 91 percent of these deaths were found to be preventable. Under Mayor Scott's leadership, this work has been taken to the next level — with a focus on coordination and policy change that yields long-term impact.

The Child Fatality Review Five-Year Report released in January 2022 found that homicide was the leading cause of child fatality, with 45 youth between the ages of 7-17 being killed by a non-relative third party. Between 2016-2020, twenty-four children from birth to age seven were killed by a parent or caregiver. Victims of fatality were predominantly vulnerable infants and toddlers and 16- and 17-year-old youth struggling in school and involved in the juvenile justice system. Additionally, 90 percent of children who died were children of color, reflecting the structural racism that is a root cause of the harrowing social and environmental factors underlying child fatality.

Addressing one key recommendation of the Child Fatality Review Report released in January 2022, MONSE will use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to increase the number of trained Baltimore City Public School System staff, including social workers, psychologists, and counselors, in Mental Health First Aid. The training teaches signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems and how to differentiate potential problems from typical adolescent development.

MONSE will also fund staff support to the Child Fatality Review Team, training for Baltimore City Public School employees, an integrated case management system, inter-agency care coordination, and the Baltimore Child Abuse Center (BCAC) for a total investment of \$1.5 million. Funding for BCAC will also support the PAAVE (Pathways to Advocacy Against Violence Everyday) program, which provides trauma-sensitive, evidence-based, intensive case management, mental health treatment and meaningful referrals to youth and their families who have been impacted by a youth homicide or a near-fatal incident. The work of BCAC is critical to violence prevention and intervention efforts, as children who have been abused are more prone to abusive behaviors.

Youth Diversion Efforts

Historically, Baltimore has over-invested in punitive approaches when young people act out or make a mistake. In Baltimore, Black youth are overrepresented in the youth justice system.

The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) data for Fiscal Year 2020 illustrates the problem. Out of the six DJS regions, Baltimore saw the highest percentage of intake into DJS among Black youth at 95.6 percent. Complaints were formalized or referred to the DJS court for more than 80 percent of youth in Baltimore. This exceeds the statewide rate of formalization, which is 38.9 percent. Simply stated, Baltimore is two times more likely than the surrounding counties to introduce its young people to the criminal justice system.

MONSE has worked hand-in-hand with community partners to reduce the harm and negative outcomes associated with youth arrests and incarceration through the creation of Baltimore-based programs including the city's first-of-its-kind pre-arrest diversion program, also known as SideStep Youth Diversion. Since the launch of SideStep in January 2021, MONSE has trained 109 sworn BPD personnel, enrolled two young people in the Western District and established a partnership with the Center for Urban Families to embed the program's services in the community.

MONSE is actively working in partnership with BPD, DJS, and the Office of the Public Defender on a citywide plan to scale-up SideStep, while preparing for the program's initial evaluation.

Supporting Grassroots Efforts

With the Mayor's \$50 million ARPA investment in violence prevention, MONSE is making grant dollars available to community-based organization that provide services to youth that seek to prevent violence, increase justice, and address trauma. Organizations awarded funding include Challenge 2 Change and Let's Thrive Baltimore, who provide community violence intervention programming focused on youth.

MONSE stands ready to partner with other City and State agencies to build on these efforts to prevent violence and reduce the victimization of Baltimore's young people.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S Jackson". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "S" and a cursive "Jackson".

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

cc: Natasha Mehu, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
Nina Themelis, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations