

Recommendation xx: The Mayor and Common Council should further expand the use of a public health approach to curb violent crimes. [Community e-mail 34]

Discussion: This recommendation came to the Committee *via* email from a community member, and it strikes us as an important reminder about the limitations of relying solely on police to solve the problem of violence in our community. While the charge to this Committee—and hence the bulk of this report—has been to address the strengths and weaknesses of the MPD, it must always be kept in mind that police are but one part of the solution to violent crime. It is essential that the City not focus so much on the police that it overlooks other aspects of the problem and the solution.

Violent crime is a public health issue. Violence can be prevented and its impact reduced by public health approaches, just as public health efforts have prevented and reduced infectious diseases, nutritional deficiencies, pregnancy-related complications, and workplace injuries. Violence can be encouraged or discouraged by contextual social, biological, and environmental factors. Moreover, as first recognized by epidemiologists, violence has many of the properties of a contagious disease—including person-to-person transmission across social networks.¹ Rather than seeing violence as a side-effect of moral characteristics (bad guys doing bad things), a public health lens reframes violence as a preventable disease, which can be cured with the help of the community.

A public health approach is interdisciplinary and science-based. The body of evidence for the efficacy of such an approach in preventing violence is extensive and growing. The basic methodology involves understanding the problem through data collection and analysis, designing interventions and policies to tackle the problem using multiple services, monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions, and modifying practice to scale up and use the strategies found to be most successful.

This provides a set of approaches separate from and complementary to policing. An extensive body of research has found that, in American cities, expansion of police force size has minimal effects on violent crime rates, though innovative policing strategies (e.g., increased use of problem-oriented policing) can have a beneficial impact.^{2,3} Meanwhile, research shows that investment in efficacious public health approaches can achieve a large reduction in violent crime.⁴

For example, Cure Violence, a Chicago-based NGO, uses a public health perspective to help cities around the world reduce their gun violence levels, using the methods and strategies of disease control. Under this model, a city responds to outbreaks of violent behavior with three common epidemic-control methods: interrupting transmission, containing the risk, and changing community norms. It has been proven successful through rigorous, independent, scientific evaluations, showing large statistically significant reductions in violence where implemented.

Advance Peace is another such program. Advance Peace grew out of the Richmond, CA, Office of Neighborhood Safety program. Richmond experienced a 76% reduction in homicides after

¹ Green, B., Thibaut, H., & Papachristos, A.V. (2017). Modeling contagion through social networks to explain and predict gunshot violence in Chicago, 2006 to 2014. *JAMA Internal Medicine* 177(3), 326-333.

² Bayley, D.H. (1994). *Police for the Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³ Lee, Y.J., Eck, J.E., & Corsaro, N. (2016). Conclusions from the history of research into the effects of police force size on crime—1968 through 2013: A historical systematic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 12(3), 431-451.

⁴ See publications linked at cureviolence.org.

implementation of this program,⁵ and the reduction appears largely attributable to the program. The approach identifies the individuals and groups at the very highest risk of gun violence in a city and engages those individuals, offering positive developmental support (e.g. setting life goals, providing a stipend and transformative travel experiences, etc.) and working to shift norms.

As noted in “What Works to Prevent Urban Violence Among Proven Risk Young Men? The Safe and Successful Youth Initiative Evidence and Implementation Review,” there are two common features of the most effective such programs: “1. Using street outreach workers. 2. Providing positive development supports to high-risk persons.”⁶

A somewhat different type of model is that implemented by the Urban Peace/Advancement Project in high crime Los Angeles neighborhoods. This has been referred to as an asset-based, multi-sector approach to crime and public safety, and has proven very successful. As the “Vision Plan for a Safe and Healthy Watts” notes:

When working with communities that have been historically isolated, agencies often use a needs-based approach that focuses on the problems and needs of the community and assumes public or private sector agencies will provide services to an area. When trying to achieve transformational changes, this approach is often ineffective as it treats the community as a client rather than a partner.

In contrast, an asset-based approach honors and mobilizes individual and community talents, skills, and assets; and promotes community-driven development rather than development driven by external agencies. Gang-entrenched neighborhoods, in particular, require special community expertise from stakeholders experiencing or witnessing the day-to-day violence. This asset-based approach fosters authentic partnerships by identifying and nurturing community strengths in ways that directly enhance public safety and health efforts.

Multi-sector collaboration is vital; without the support and buy-in of residents and organizations working in the area, policy and program efforts – no matter how remarkable – are ultimately unsustainable. Authentic engagement of diverse disciplines, sectors, and resident perspectives ensures the development of solutions that honor and nurture existing community assets and leadership. Successful implementation of violence reduction and prevention strategies centers on real community input and lasting engagement, community’s ownership over the solutions, and intentional capacity building of community residents and stakeholders to sustain collaboration and momentum.⁷

⁵ Seidel J. (2016, December 17). Program taps unusual weapon to stop killings: Respect. *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved from freep.com.

⁶ Campie, P.E., Petrosino, A., Pace, J., Fronius, T., Guckenburg, S. Wiatrowski, & Ward, S. (2013). *What Works to Prevent Urban Violence Among Proven Risk Young Men? The Safe and Successful Youth Initiative Evidence and Implementation Review*. Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services. Boston, MA.

⁷ Watts Regional School Safety Collaborative. (2015, March). *Vision Plan for a Safe and Healthy Watts*. Urban Peace (a program of Advancement Project). Retrieved from publichealth.lacounty.gov.

The resultant Comprehensive Violence Reduction Strategy in Los Angeles links all the elements of violence reduction with community development, cultural transformation, multi-jurisdictional coordination, and accountability. Some of the components of this program include training and deployment of violence interrupters/gang interventionists (similar to Cure Violence), an initiative to provide alternative activities and jobs for youth in parks during peak hours of gang activity, and a specialized neighborhood-oriented policing program (that actively discourages citations and arrests for minor offenses, while building relationships and trust through provision of services unrelated to law enforcement). Where implemented, this program appears to have resulted in up to a 90% reduction in violent crime.⁸

In this context, it is important to recognize that violence is regulated through informal sources of social control arising from residents and organizations internal to communities. Local nonprofit groups that focus on reducing violence and building stronger communities (e.g., community nonprofits that respond to violence by cleaning streets, building playgrounds, mentoring children and employing young men) have a real effect on crime rates. Research indicates that every 10 additional such organizations in a city with 100,000 residents reduce the rate of violent crime by 6% and the homicide rate by 9%.⁹

The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) represents another successful similar program, using a multi-sector public health approach, with heavy reliance on community members and organizations—including mentors, workers in hospital emergency departments, employment programs, school programs, programs to reduce adverse childhood experiences, etc. The SVRU defines its work as “a public health approach which treats violence as a disease. We seek to diagnose and analyze the root causes of violence in Scotland, then develop and evaluate solutions which can be scaled-up across the country.”¹⁰

A number of other more specific approaches also warrant mention. The National Network of Hospital-Based Violence-Intervention Programs supports prevention work in hospitals and trauma centers (e.g., helping prevent cascades of retaliatory shootings). Summer jobs programs, such as the Boston Summer Youth Employment Program, have been shown to reduce crime among youth, with persistent effects long after the end of the program and declines particularly pronounced among youth of color.¹¹ Mentoring and positive supportive relationships with adults, such as that provided by My Brother’s Keeper Alliance (an initiative providing mentoring to high-risk boys of color), is correlated with reduced gun violence. Likewise, the school-based Becoming A Man program, which includes mentoring and cognitive behavior therapy, has been shown to produce large reductions in criminal arrests among participants¹² (see Recommendation xx). More aggressive lead remediation/childhood intervention

⁸ Monroe-Kane, C. (Host). (2014, December 21). Interview with Connie Rice. *To the Best of Our Knowledge*. Wisconsin Public Radio. archive.ttbook.org/book/reforming-lapd.

⁹ Sharkey, P., Torrats-Espinosa, G., & Takyar, D. (2017). Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime. *American Sociological Review* 82(6), 1214-1240.

¹⁰ *About the Violence Reduction Unit*. Retrieved from actiononviolence.org/about-us.

¹¹ Modestino, A.S. (2017, December). *How can summer jobs reduce crime among youth? An evaluation of the Boston summer youth employment program*. Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program. Retrieved from brookings.edu.

¹² Heller, S.B., Shah, A.K., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H.A. (2017, February). Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132(1), 1–54.

efforts can also be of substantial benefit for crime and public safety—childhood lead exposure is a well-established causal factor for violent crime in adults, and existing evidence indicates that childhood lead exposure may be a major driver of overall crime rates.¹³

In Madison, multiple initiatives are underway. A holistic violence interruption approach, including peer-support counseling, has been implemented by the Focused Interruption Coalition. Meanwhile, the Northside Madison Safe and Thriving Community plan has provided a further blueprint for a multi-sector public health approach to prevent and interrupt youth violence. Public Health Madison & Dane County has been working on violence prevention initiatives and in 2018 selected a violence prevention coordinator. The Madison-area Out-of-School Time program has been set up to connect children and teens with high-quality programs and mentoring during their out-of-school time. And a 2016 report from Alders Maurice Cheeks and Matt Phair has advocated implementation of additional approaches.

There is an increasing consensus among Madison elected officials regarding the value and importance of such a public health/violence interruption approach. Madison could benefit from further funding and cultivating such programs, drawing on models with established success. Another of the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations is similar, advocating expansion of public health approaches, but is directed to MPD (Recommendation xx; OIR 28). The current recommendation takes a wider, holistic perspective and is directed to the Mayor and Common Council, since many public health programs that should be considered for implementation or expansion would be separate from the police department.

¹³ Drum K. (2018, February 1). An Updated Lead-Crime Roundup for 2018. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from motherjones.com.