

## Open Letter to Mayor Kenney & City Council: Invest in Safer Communities

Dear Mayor Kenney and the Councilmembers of Philadelphia,

In 2020, Philadelphia experienced its most violent and deadliest year due to gun violence, with more than 2,240 people shot and 499 people killed. The homicide rate was 40% higher than in 2019, and 2021 is on course to exceed last year's numbers. Many victims were under the age of 25, including children. The majority of victims were Black male Philadelphians, with an increase in victimization amongst Latinos.

The loss of life, profound emotional and mental trauma, and safety concerns as a result of this gun violence epidemic have impacted our entire city, including the thousands of victims, survivors and families who are still suffering from loss and damage of gun violence.

The costs extend further. The City found that gun violence in 2018 cost more than \$578 million due to medical expenses, lost earnings, property damage, and criminal justice costs. The costs would be even higher under the significantly higher violence in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

We know what is needed to reduce violence in Philadelphia. Many cities, including Philadelphia, implemented effective violence intervention, prevention initiatives and models that achieved rapid, sustained reductions in fatal and non-fatal shootings. Additionally, critical local efforts to provide opportunities for youth further reduced the risk. **We need those programs to return and grow, and to bring successful models from other communities to our city.**

We, the undersigned organizations and community leaders, demand an additional \$100 million investment in the upcoming budget, to build safer communities over the coming three years. This investment should include:

- *A community-based grant program to support, expand and evaluate community evidence-based or evidence-informed programs that address violence.*<sup>2</sup> These programs could include, but is not limited to, trauma-informed care; hospital-based gun violence intervention programs; healing

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<sup>1</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Public Health. (2018). [The Cost of Gun Violence](#).

<sup>2</sup> While the true societal and taxpayer costs of gun violence may be as high as \$25 million per homicide victim, we began with a very conservative metric which is the medical costs associated with an intensive care [unit hospitalization due to a firearm injury: \\$43,200](#). We multiplied that by the number of homicides and non-fatal shootings in 2020 (2,238) for a total of \$96.6 million. We've added in an additional \$3.5 million to reflect 2021 is already ahead of this number. This figure only represents a small portion of the costs associated with firearm injury and death, it provides a minimum level of support a year needed to significantly reduce violence.

## Open Letter to Mayor Kenney & City Council: Invest in Safer Communities

justice centers; culturally competent and relevant programs that provide clinical or psychoeducational support for youth and families; victim and witness services; targeted violence reduction programs; other proven violence reduction approaches; and new community-driven, integrated efforts that are responsive to community needs.

- *An investment in school-based violence prevention programs to reduce violence and victimization amongst students.* School-based violence prevention programs can change how youth think and feel about violence, and enhance interpersonal and emotional skills, such as communication, problem-solving, empathy, and conflict management.<sup>3</sup> Effective approaches that address growing youth violence also include mentorship, creating non-punitive curfew centers, and providing jobs training.
- *Reopen shuttered parks and recreation centers, implement youth-centric programs, and reinvigorate community-resources in high-violence areas.* Studies and experts have revealed that shuttered parks, recreation centers and youth programs during the pandemic have contributed to surging violence. Quickly reopening and revitalizing these centers in high-violence areas will ensure community assets are restored, new programs can be developed, and outreach can be expanded to better connect with local at-risk youth.

These financial investments must be paired with increased transparency and sustained support for evaluation. These measures are as follows:

- *Increase transparency and develop a long-term plan:* Release a full evaluation and accounting of all violence reduction efforts, across City departments and agencies, over the next 6 months, leading to a long-term budget strategy to provide sustained reductions in the violence.
- *Ensure sustainability of successful programs:* Based on ongoing evaluation, invest additional resources to continue successful programs that reduce gun violence.

Similar efforts elsewhere in the United States have resulted in swift reductions in gun violence. An independent analysis found street outreach programs in New York City cut gun injury rates by 45% more than areas without such efforts.<sup>4</sup> An effort in Oakland, California found a 50% reduction in violence while other cities saw a major surge in shootings.<sup>5</sup> Participants of cognitive behavioral therapy

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<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office for the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy. (2017). [What is school-based violence prevention?](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>4</sup> Delgado, S. A., Alsbahi, L., Wolff, K., Alexander, N., Cobar, P., & Butts, J. A. (2017). [The Effects Of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn.](#) Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

<sup>5</sup> Giffords Law Center, Faith in Action, & Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium. (2019). [A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland's Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence.](#) Giffords Law Center.

## **Open Letter to Mayor Kenney & City Council: Invest in Safer Communities**

combined with workforce development were 54 times less likely to be involved in violence. These are only a few of the successful violence reduction programs across the country that can serve as effective models for Philadelphia.

The key to these successful efforts was significant funding for outreach and community-based violence prevention programs, coupled with strategic, collaborative partnerships between city officials, community leaders, and service providers.

Our city is bleeding to death as gun violence continues to claim the lives of our loved ones, neighbors and children. It is imperative that steps are taken to address this public health crisis immediately by providing vital, life sustaining resources that would better ensure Philadelphians are safe from gun violence in their communities, and better positioned to have healthy and fulfilling lives.

Sincerely,

Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia

Awareness Acceptance Action, LLC

Beyond the Bars

Black Male Community Council

Blackout Girl LLC

CeaseFirePA

Philadelphia CeaseFire

Central Division Victims Services

The Charles Foundation

Dare2Hope

D.I.V.A.S Ministry Group

Every Murder is Real (EMIR)

Fatherhood Foundation

Healing Communities USA

Institute for Development of African American Youth (IDAAY)

Dr. Jessica Beard

March For Our Lives Pennsylvania

Mastery Charter Schools – Pickett Campus

Millennials in Action

## **Open Letter to Mayor Kenney & City Council: Invest in Safer Communities**

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America  
Mothers in Charge  
Mt. Vernon Manor CDC  
National Homicide Justice Alliance  
NOMO INC  
Northwest Victims Services  
Our Words Heal  
Pennsylvania Health Law Project  
Philadelphia Community Outreach  
Power LIVE Free  
Reclaim Philadelphia  
Rock to the Future  
Stop Killing Us  
Storyteller Studios Plus  
TLD Building Bridges  
Unity in the Community  
Uplift Center for Grieving Children  
Urban League of Philadelphia  
Urgent 365  
Victim/Witness Services of South Philadelphia  
West Philadelphia Prevention Coalition  
Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH Philly)  
Dr. Zoë Maher  
100 Black Men of Philadelphia