

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement



Public Roundtable
on

**NEXT STEPS IN THE DISTRICT'S
PUBLIC HEALTH-BASED APPROACH TO
VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION**

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Charles Allen, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Council Chamber
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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Good morning, Chairperson Allen, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. My name is Del McFadden, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Safer, Stronger Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE). I am pleased to offer my testimony on the District's public health-based approach to violence prevention and intervention.

Mayor Bowser is strongly committed to preventing violence in our city. As the head of ONSE, I share the Mayor's vision that reducing violence cannot be done through law enforcement alone. To make our city safer and stronger, we must provide economic and educational opportunities, and equitable access to quality services.

Since assuming the role of Executive Director, I've met with Councilmembers to discuss our shared goals of public health-based approaches to violence prevention and intervention. I look forward to continuing our relationships and having an ongoing dialogue that contributes to this office's success and the safety of our city.

The work of violence prevention and intervention in District government can be one of the toughest jobs, but also the most rewarding because we are saving lives. Only by collaborating across multiple agencies and with community-based organizations will we be able to successfully coordinate and implement a comprehensive approach to addressing violence. I am thankful for the support of our partners across the District government and in the non-profit world. In particular, I appreciate the work done by the Office of the Attorney General and the National Association for the Advancement of Returning Citizens' "CURE the Streets" program. Our offices are working together to meet the needs of the communities and provide opportunities to our residents.

Pathways Program

One of ONSE's core functions is to identify and recruit individuals most at risk of being involved in violence. Everything we do at ONSE – and I mean every single person in this office – we believe in the people we serve by meeting them where they are and helping them envision and develop a pathway to where they want to be. And our approach – the Pathways Program – is showing great promise.

The Pathways Program seeks to decrease criminal justice involvement and improve the outcomes of individuals known to participate in high-risk activities that could result in violence. Based on best practices used in several other jurisdictions with similar models, we developed Pathways to be a nine-month long program with no more than 25 participants in each cohort. While engaged with Pathways, participants receive subsidized payment, case management, transformative mentoring, and human service supports designed to meet their individual and family needs. In addition, Pathways participants obtain life skills and workforce development training designed to prepare them for six months of subsidized employment and, ultimately, long-term unsubsidized employment.

The first cohort of the Pathways Program started on June 18, 2018. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 36, with an average age of 26. Twenty-four participants were initially enrolled, 18



participants were promoted from the 12-week life skills and workforce curriculum component, and 17 participants were placed in subsidized or unsubsidized employment. In other words, 71 percent of the first Pathways cohort stayed with the entire program and obtained jobs. The ONSE team employs a simple system for working with the Pathways cohort; we call it “relentless pursuit.” And because we know that every cohort member has their own individual needs, our case management team designs a life plan for any participant who leaves the program, either voluntarily or because of noncompliance with program guidelines.

The second Pathways cohort started December 3, 2018. The participants range in age from 21 to 31, with an average age of 25. Twenty-four participants were initially enrolled and currently remain in the program. By partnering with the Department of Employment Services (DOES), we have already begun the process of placing this second cohort into subsidized employment or have worked with the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) to connect participants with an educational enrichment program.

Community Stabilization Program

In 2015, Mayor Bowser created the Community Stabilization Program (CSP), originally within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and now within ONSE. The CSP serves as the District’s critical response effort to support victims and families directly impacted by acts of violence. The CSP team coordinates District agencies’ responses after a violent incident becomes a homicide, involves a juvenile gunshot victim, or is believed to be a gang/crew related. The CSP team’s mission is to identify and meet the needs of an affected family, or the affected community, by providing immediate supports and connections to services. In Fiscal Year 2018, the ONSE CSP team provided support and outreach to 226 families.

Violence Intervention and Prevention Program

The ONSE Violence Intervention and Prevention Program seeks to disrupt and reduce violence by establishing a strong presence in communities and partnering with residents, government agencies, and community-based organizations. After an open and competitive procurement process, ONSE selected three community-based organizations to be part of our program and awarded them a total of \$2.6 million for services. To serve residents in Wards 1 through 5, we selected Collaborative Solutions for Communities; to serve Wards 6 and 7, we selected Training Grounds; and to serve Ward 8, we selected Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative. Each of these organizations has past success with violence intervention projects and deep ties to priority communities.

Utilizing best practices, and in coordination with local and national violence intervention experts, ONSE developed a mandatory week-long violence intervention/prevention training. The training covers the history of violence in the District, an overview of communities most at risk, the effects of trauma, maintaining the safety of staff and partners, and how to effectively prevent retaliatory violence. The training also focused on conducting ceasefires and mediations, mobilizing families and communities in violence prevention, and identifying stakeholders. All ONSE violence interrupters are required to take the training twice per year.



Our contracts with the three community-based organizations allows them to provide 24 staff members to conduct the daily work of prevention/intervention efforts and case management. Each organization has a Program Manager and administrative support staff. These three organizations serve [16](#) priority communities in the District, but also are responsible for responding to any homicide anywhere in their wards on a 24/7 basis. Their response entails going to the scene of the incident; identifying the victim and, if possible, the aggressor; trying to identify any factors that led to the incident; determining the likelihood of retaliation or additional violence; and interacting with the affected neighborhood. Our community partners facilitate triage meetings within 24 hours of critical incidents and conduct hospital and home visits when appropriate. The community partners then send a detailed report to ONSE after every critical incident response.

ONSE works with partners to stay abreast of potential community and interpersonal conflicts that have the potential to escalate to violence. If we believe these conflicts have a serious chance of turning violent, our staff and our community partners use their intervention training to interrupt. When there has already been an act of conflict or violence, our community partners broker agreements to reduce the potential of retaliatory violence. Since last summer, we have helped negotiate twelve successful ceasefires.

Our community partners engage with affected residents for up to 60 days after a critical incident response. These engagements include assistance with obtaining emergency food and clothing; connection to workforce and education programs; linkage to in-patient substance abuse treatment; assistance with funeral costs; accessing housing resources; and brokering intra-family agreements. Since last summer, we have assisted 46 families.

Community partners are also responsible for attending, sponsoring, and hosting various community events and activities. These events are designed to develop community trust and build relationships that will support our efforts to reduce threats of violence in the community. Our community partners and ONSE staff have conducted outreach through more than 100 community block parties and cook outs, sporting events, community meetings, healing circles, back to school supply giveaways, health fairs, and behavior modification groups. We have partnered with a wide spectrum of community-based organizations and faith groups, including Ascension, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Cedar Height Apartments, United Medical Center, the Eckeridge Program, Cardozo Education Campus, Mid-City/Brookland Manor Apartments, LeDroit Park Recreation Center, Freedom Fighters DMV, and a number of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions. These partnerships helped with the implementation of violence intervention strategies by meeting needs such as grief and loss counseling, space for community programming, and identifying families most in need of violence intervention services.

Because we know violence intervention requires access to health services, we have conducted a number of weekly support and behavior modification groups to residents in priority communities being served by our violence intervention teams. These groups covered topics such as defining manhood, changing behaviors that are detrimental to self and others, addressing trauma,



responsibility to self, family and community, peaceful conflict resolution, and preparing for employment. We had about 120 community members who participated in these groups.

Thank you, Chairperson Allen, for letting me share the work being done by ONSE and our community partners. We know there is a great amount of work to be done, and while we celebrate the successes of the residents we serve, we continuously work to improve individual outcomes and reduce violence. I am available to address any questions.

